



# **NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL**

**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

## **THESIS**

**EXPORTING THE COLOMBIAN “MODEL”:  
COMPARING LAW ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES  
TOWARDS SECURITY AND STABILITY OPERATIONS  
IN COLOMBIA AND MÉXICO**

by

Michael E. Loconsolo

June 2014

Thesis Advisor:  
Second Reader:

Marcos Berger  
Rodrigo Nieto Gómez

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ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES TOWARDS SECURITY AND STABILITY  
OPERATIONS IN COLOMBIA AND MÉXICO**

Michael E. Loconsolo  
Major, United States Army  
B.S., United States Military Academy at West Point, 2003

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**NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL  
June 2014**

Author: Michael E. Loconsolo

Approved by: Marcos Berger  
Thesis Advisor

Rodrigo Nieto Gómez  
Second Reader

John Arquilla  
Chair, Department of Defense Analysis

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## **ABSTRACT**

The increase in violence involving transnational organized crime syndicates in various parts of México in the twenty-first century is widely viewed as a challenge to security and stability. Some observers have drawn comparisons with the well documented conflict in Colombia in the 1980s and 1990s between the Colombian government and the Medellín and Cali cartels. Various factors, including the professionalization of the Colombian National Police, are viewed as a model for improving the effectiveness of law enforcement elsewhere.

This thesis asks whether a Colombian law enforcement model can be codified, in terms of key attributes, to improve security and stability in México. To this end, I explore Colombia's law enforcement strategy in the 1980s and 1990s and identify shifts in strategy that might also apply to the current struggle in México. At the same time, I identify aspects of the Colombian model that have little or no relevance to contemporary México. I argue that the Colombian model can do little to reduce or eliminate the production and transportation of illegal narcotics by México-based organized crime syndicates; however, a hybrid version of the Colombian model could help reduce the overall power of the cartels and enhance security and stability throughout México.

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## **LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS**

CNP	Colombian National Police
DEA	Drug Enforcement Agency
FES	Fuerzas Especiales; México's Special Forces
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
IO	information operations
Los Pepes	People persecuted by Pablo Escobar
MS-13	Mara Salvatrucha-13
PRI	Institutional Revolutionary Party
SOCOM	Special Operations Command
TOC	transnational organized crime
VSO	village stability operations

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## **I. EXPORTING THE COLOMBIAN MODEL?**

The increase in violence in the first decade of the twenty-first century between transnational organized crime (TOC) and the state security forces in various regions of México was widely viewed as a challenge to security and stability, particularly during the presidency of Felipe Calderón (December 1, 2006–November 30, 2012). Some observers have drawn comparisons between the contemporary struggle with organized crime syndicates in México and the well documented conflict in Colombia in the 1980s and 1990s between the Colombian government and Pablo Escobar (the head of the Medellín cartel) and latterly the Cali cartel. Escobar (born on December 1, 1949) was killed by Colombian law enforcement on December 2, 1993 and by the end of the 1990s, both cartels had been eliminated. The strengthening and professionalization of the *Policía Nacional de Colombia* (Colombian National Police—CNP) in this period is viewed as a possible model for improving the capability and effectiveness of law enforcement elsewhere. Specifically, some observers find relevance in the Colombian model (from the 1980s and 1990s) to the improvement of security and stability in México in the twenty-first century. This study addresses the question: Can key attributes of the Colombian law enforcement model of the 1980s and 1990s be identified and applied to México's contemporary struggle against organized crime?

### **A. BACKGROUND**

The Colombian government spent over a decade combatting two potent drug trafficking cartels. By 1980, profoundly high levels of violence had polarized Colombian society.<sup>1</sup> The Medellín cartel, responsible for roughly 80 percent of cocaine in the United States, established death squads that targeted anyone associated with its competition, including political leaders, security officials, unionists, and intellectuals.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the political system was saturated with corruption, so much so that even Pablo Escobar was

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<sup>1</sup> Scott B. MacDonald, *Mountain High, White Avalanche: Cocaine and Power in the Andean States and Panama* (New York: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1989), 17.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

elected as a congressional representative in 1982.<sup>3</sup> Although security forces maintained a tactical advantage in composition and kinetic capability, they were strategically ineffective in containing the growth in power and influence of the Medellín and Cali cartels throughout the country.

Nevertheless, power shifted back in the government's direction after years of reform in law enforcement strategy down to the mid-1990s. A close partnership with the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) assisted in more effective Colombian operations to disrupt narco-activities.<sup>4</sup> A decade later, México experienced a spike in violence during the presidency of Felipe Calderón similar to Colombia in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Since Calderón's initiative began in December 2006, tens of thousands of people were killed in violence associated with organized crime throughout the country.<sup>5</sup> At a general level, the Mexican struggle resembles the Colombian problem in various ways, including intimidation and bribery, extensive corruption at municipal, state, and federal levels of authority, ineffective local law enforcement, the deployment of federal military forces to combat drug cartels, and genuine national security concerns from both the U.S. and Mexican governments.<sup>6</sup>

## **B. PURPOSE AND SCOPE**

While some suggest that Colombia developed a successful and exportable approach to defeating organized criminal activity, others suggest that Colombia's model was simply an appropriate fit for the specific context in which it operated. The purpose of my research is to understand the Colombian cartels of the late twentieth century as well as the history and contemporary dynamics of the criminal organizations in México, in order to determine the applicability of Colombia's law enforcement model of the 1980s and 1990s to México's current struggle.

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<sup>3</sup> MacDonald, *Mountain High, White Avalanche*, 25.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>5</sup> Sylvia Longmire, *Cartel: The Coming Invasion of México's Drug Wars* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 8.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 10.

In relation to Colombia, I focus on the rise of the Medellín and Cali cartels beginning in the early 1980s, and I conclude with Pablo Escobar's death in late 1993 (which precipitated the effective elimination of the Medellín organization) and the subsequent demise of the Cali cartel in the mid-1990s. For México, I focus on the period beginning with President Calderón's offensive against existing criminal organizations starting in December 2006 to the present-day struggles against Mexican-based transnational organized crime syndicates. While my research includes activities of all the major cartels operating in México, it focuses on three particular criminal organizations: the Sinaloa cartel, *Los Zetas*, and *Los Caballeros Templarios* (Knights Templar). I also examine the strategy pursued by Mexican security forces and the supporting role by international partners. Against the background of the ongoing debate about law enforcement in both Colombia and México, I end by drawing some conclusions about the relevance of Colombia's law enforcement model to contemporary México.

### **C. METHODOLOGY**

To assess the applicability of Colombia's law enforcement model to México's current struggle, I apply detailed case studies of drug trafficking organizations in Colombia during the 1980s and 1990s and organized crime in México from 2006 to the present day. In both cases, I use a revised version of Leites and Wolf's input-output model.<sup>7</sup> This model involves exogenous and endogenous inputs that produce outputs that directly impact authorities and the sustainment of future criminal activity. Second, I focus on the law enforcement strategy and associated external support, particularly as it succeeded in Colombia's defeat of large cartel enterprises. I take a similar approach to México and incorporate results from the Colombian case study to identify elements that appropriately fit with México's struggle.

### **D. LITERATURE REVIEW**

My research includes the use of various works that explain the history and dynamics of drug trafficking and organized crime in Colombia. Belen Boville provides a

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<sup>7</sup> Nathan Leites and Charles Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority: An Analytic Essay on Insurgent Conflicts* (Chicago: Markham Publishing Company, 1970), 32–35.

history of cocaine development and distribution in her 2004 *The Cocaine War in Context: Drugs and Politics*. Boville begins with the origin of drug policies in the United States and the associated development of organized criminal activity.<sup>8</sup> Overall, she provides a look at U.S.-Colombian cooperation, which can in turn be used to link Colombia to the current challenges in México.

Similar to Boville, Scott MacDonald delivered an analysis of the cocaine industry in the Andean region from the 1970s through the 1980s in his 1989 *Mountain High, White Avalanche: Cocaine and Power in the Andean States and Panama*. At the time of this publication, the U.S. was just beginning efforts towards an anti-drug campaign. He provided relevant policy options for the United States in the war on drugs as the world entered the final decade of the twentieth century, including a focus on domestic demand as well as external supply. Specifically, MacDonald suggested the introduction of drug education programs, stricter penalties on drug distribution, and greater regulation on chemical exports.<sup>9</sup> He warned that U.S. policy must place greater priority on the Andean states or face dire consequences; a warning that most would agree was heeded by policymakers in the following decade.<sup>10</sup> Some argue that similar warnings apply to U.S. policy towards México today.

While MacDonald's publication provides an understanding of the Colombian power struggle in the 1980s, Mark Bowden's 2001 *Killing Pablo*, examines the rise and fall of Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel, concluding with his death in late 1993 and its subsequent impact on security and stability in Colombia.<sup>11</sup> Bowden's account of the Medellín cartel provides the detail necessary to understand the cartel's extraordinary rise to power. Furthermore, his description of the cartel's demise illuminates the changes in law enforcement strategy in Colombia by the early 1990s.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Belen Boville, *The Cocaine War in Context: Drugs and Politics* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2004), 25.

<sup>9</sup> MacDonald, *Mountain High, White Avalanche*, 120, 122.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 136.

<sup>11</sup> Mark Bowden, *Killing Pablo: The Hunt for the World's Greatest Outlaw* (New York: Viking Penguin, 2001), 15.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 260.

Ron Chepesiuk's 2003 *The Bullet or the Bribe: Taking Down Colombia's Cali Drug Cartel*, details the organizational depth that allowed the Cali cartel to grow in power and influence. By the early 1990s, the Cali cartel appeared to be an enduring organization with global reach, while the Medellín cartel had lost favor with its supporters and increasingly struggled to exist. The demise of the Medellín cartel eventually allowed U.S. and Colombian officials to focus efforts against the Cali cartel. In 1994, General Rosso Jose Serrano was appointed Chief of the Colombian National Police (CNP). Serrano immediately addressed the corruption, unprofessionalism, and ill-training of the CNP to form a more effective security organization. Chepesiuk explains that although far from perfect, Serrano's efforts produced a capable CNP that worked closely with U.S. organizations. Ultimately, the Cali cartel was defeated after the arrest and conviction of its leaders in the mid-1990s.<sup>13</sup> Chepesiuk concludes that a large signature in organized crime ultimately increases vulnerability to targeting and can eventually lead to defeat.<sup>14</sup> This resulted in the modern-day, Colombian-based *cartelitos*, or small drug organizations, and the international power vacuum that has been filled by often much larger Mexican-based cartels.<sup>15</sup>

In the case of México, Sylvia Longmire's 2011 *Cartel: The Coming Invasion of México's Drug Wars*, describes cartel operations and their impact on both the United States and México. Longmire examines now ex-President Felipe Calderón's aggressive policy against organized crime, and presents a number of suggestions in engaging México's security issues.<sup>16</sup> First, she argues that while the cartels are widely labeled as an aggressive form of organized crime, that label does not fit an enemy who clearly engages in terrorist and insurgent-like violence.<sup>17</sup> Second, Longmire proposes various strategic priorities in defeating the cartels. She suggests that Mexican forces target monetary profits in addition to military strikes on narco-safe havens and attempts to

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<sup>13</sup> Ron Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2003), 118, 200–201.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 258.

<sup>16</sup> Longmire, *Cartel*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 175–177.

purge corruption at all levels of government and law enforcement.<sup>18</sup> Longmire also explains that U.S. policy should focus on border security<sup>19</sup> consider the legalization of various narcotics, and enforce stricter federal gun laws.<sup>20</sup> While Longmire provides general suggestions for U.S. involvement, there is little detail or specifics as to how the U.S. should implement her policy suggestions.

Complementing Longmire's view, Ioan Grillo's 2011 *El Narco: Inside México's Criminal Insurgency*, describes México's narco-industry as a diversified and dangerous movement that threatens security within the country's borders. He argues that México's criminal organizations resemble an insurgency more so than a mere band of criminals, citing the way in which they organize personnel, the presence of dedicated paramilitary wings, and insurgent-style attacks that have left certain regions of México in disarray.<sup>21</sup> In considerations for a way ahead in México's struggle against organized crime, Grillo cites past efforts against Colombian cartels, including the use of informants and a kingpin strategy that targets cartel leaders, as a current strategy of Mexican security forces. While he suggests that informant networks are essential in combatting the cartels, he questions the effectiveness of arresting or killing criminal leadership.<sup>22</sup> Grillo cautions that the cartels' expansion into Central American countries and their diversified set of criminal activity outside of drug trafficking is cause for alarm, suggesting the possibility of a broader civil war that could engulf the entire country.<sup>23</sup> To avoid such consequences, Grillo's final chapter offers a strategy for peace. Despite recognizing the diversified character of criminal organizations in México, he suggests that drug legalization is at the

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 181–182.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 198.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 199.

<sup>21</sup> Ioan Grillo, *El Narco: Inside México's Criminal Insurgency* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2011), 211, 213, 217.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 226, 239.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 273.

core of reducing organized crime.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, he touches on México's needs to address military desertions, police reform, and social programs for the local populace.<sup>25</sup>

No study of Mexican-based organized crime is complete without the detailed studies on the topic by George W. Grayson. His latest is 2014 *The Cartels: The Story of Mexico's Most Dangerous Criminal Organizations and Their Impact on U.S. Security*, which chronicles the violence associated with organized crime in México and emphasizes the challenges faced in the provision of U.S. support. Amongst his many publications on México's contemporary struggles, I particularly drew from his 2010 *La Familia Drug Cartel: Implications for U.S.-Mexican Security* to examine the dynamics of organized crime in the volatile state of Michoacán. Grayson suggests numerous steps to curb the influence of organized crime, to include a focus on informants and intelligence gathering, increased multi-national support, and cooperation with the Mexican community living in United States.<sup>26</sup> His proposals provide a balanced approach to policy and strategy against organized crime, and if implemented, could have positive effects on security and stability within México.

In addition to the literature listed above, I used a number of journal articles that took different perspectives on Colombia and México. I also paid close attention to media coverage on the ongoing struggle in México, as the environment under a new presidential administration continues to rapidly evolve. Additionally, I acquired non-attributable information from various sources. My research confirmed that anonymity is crucial to the safety of individuals, and necessary in obtaining insightful observations.

## **E. CHAPTER REVIEW AND HYPOTHESIS**

The remainder of this thesis is divided into five chapters. In Chapter II, I describe the Medellín and Cali cartels in terms of inputs, conversion mechanisms, and outputs involved in their operations. I illuminate endogenous and exogenous inputs in the form of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 276.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 286–288.

<sup>26</sup> George W. Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel: Implications for U.S.-Mexican Security* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2010), 78–83.

coercion, persuasion, recruitment, and external support. Furthermore, I explain various mechanisms the Colombian cartels used to generate profitable organizations that survived more than a decade of government pursuit. Finally, I describe the outputs in violence and their corresponding effects on authority. Chapter III evaluates the Colombian law enforcement response, which is widely credited with defeating both large cartel syndicates and reducing violence in Colombia to manageable levels. I identify cartel activity that exceeded the government's threshold for violence and resulted in a dedicated effort to defeat the cartels through strategic shifts, law enforcement reform, external support from the United States, and integration with the local populace.

Chapter IV shifts focus to México, concentrating on the contemporary struggle as it has evolved since ex-President Felipe Calderón initiated his offensive against organized crime syndicates in December 2006. Similar to Chapter II, I describe cartel activity in México as a system of inputs and outputs in order to allow a comparison of these contemporary criminal organizations to their Colombian predecessors. Chapter V draws from the previous chapters to identify the similarities and differences between Colombian drug trafficking organizations of the 1980s and 1990s and contemporary criminal organizations in México. I then evaluate the Colombian law enforcement model as it applies to the present-day struggle in México. The research suggests that although the Colombian model would have a minimal effect on drug production and transportation, a hybrid version of the Colombian model can effectively target large-scale criminal organizations, reduce violence to manageable levels, and restore order in affected regions of México. Chapter VI summarizes the previous chapters and acknowledges specific areas of research outside the scope of this thesis but contribute to the overall study of law enforcement and the struggle against organized crime in México. Overall, I argue that a hybrid version of the Colombian model can be generalized and applied to México's current internal security challenges. To this end, the next chapter looks at Colombia and evaluates the structure, particularly in terms of inputs and outputs, of the Medellín and Cali cartels during the 1980s and 1990s.



## **II. COLOMBIA: THE AGE OF CARTEL CONTROL**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The Colombian state has long been a hotbed of violence and political struggle. One of the most violent and threatening periods of recent Colombian history was the rise and fall of the Medellín and Cali drug cartels. In the late 1970s, the increased popularity of cocaine in the United States facilitated the cartels' rapid rise in power, wealth, and influence.<sup>27</sup> A decade later, the cartels had grown into multi-billion dollar, transnational criminal organizations with unprecedented control within Colombian borders and beyond. Their violent reach attracted international attention and by 1990, the media had crowned the cartel "godfathers" as the most feared terrorists in the world.<sup>28</sup> This chapter explains the cartels' operations as part of an overall system of inputs and outputs. The efficiency of these particular systems resulted in two powerful criminal organizations that afflicted Colombia and the greater international environment for almost two decades.

### **B. CARTEL BACKGROUND**

The Medellín cartel was founded by six Colombian men, but most notably it was controlled by the notorious drug lord, Pablo Escobar Gaviria. The founding members all came from lower-income upbringings with early backgrounds as street criminals. From the beginning, it established a fierce reputation through use of intimidation and violence to achieve its goals.<sup>29</sup> The Cali cartel was founded by Gilberto and Miguel Rodríguez-Orejuela as well as José Santacruz Londoño. Contrary to the Medellín cartel, these men pursued a "low-profile" strategy and the reputation of a less violent and less threatening, criminal enterprise. By the 1990s, its strategy proved successful as it was recognized as Colombia's most powerful drug trafficking syndicate.<sup>30</sup> These cartels did not reach such

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<sup>27</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 18.

<sup>28</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 15.

<sup>29</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 61.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

heights in power and influence by chance. To do so, they established a deliberate system of inputs to build their organizations, and outputs or products to reach unprecedented levels of power and influence in Colombia.

### **C. THE CARTEL SYSTEM**

As the cartels expanded, they adopted many of the same organizational characteristics of legitimate corporations. Just as large corporations, each cartel managed a system of inputs that it converted into desired outputs. In the cartels' case, the outputs came in the form of drugs and violence. To understand how the cartels made this system work, I separate the components of the system and analyze the various inputs, conversion mechanisms, and outputs that led to their rise in power. I start with an analysis of endogenous inputs that set the necessary conditions for sustained operations of the system. These inputs, or contributions, provide the cartels a foundation to develop and expand their illegal activities, contributing to their influence on Colombian society.<sup>31</sup>

#### **1. Endogenous Inputs**

##### **a. Coercion**

First, I examine endogenous inputs in the form of coercive activity, which includes kidnapping and murder, illegal tax collection, and destruction of property.<sup>32</sup> These efforts aim to intimidate those who could potentially interfere with cartel operations.

(1) Kidnapping, Assassination, Torture. The first form of endogenous contribution is identified as coercive activity that garners complicity with a group's intentions.<sup>33</sup> Both the Cali and Medellín cartels used coercive tactics early and often as a means of intimidation. In the evolution of their criminal activity, the cartels discovered kidnapping to be both a coercive and income generating tool. The founders of the Cali

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<sup>31</sup> Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority*, 32.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 33.

cartel originally joined a group called *Las Chemas*, a kidnapping organization, and used ransoms to bankroll their entry into the business of drug trafficking.<sup>34</sup>

In another form of coercion, the Cali godfathers often found it more efficient to eliminate a threat or adversary than simply to intimidate them into submission. Murder not only eliminated the problem, but provided a deterrent against the possibility of future threats. Unlike their competition in Medellín, the Cali godfathers' generally avoided targeting government officials. This did not make their activities any less barbaric. On one occasion, Miguel Rodríguez-Orejuela had a fellow drug trafficker murdered simply because Rodríguez-Orejuela coveted the man's wife.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, the Cali cartel employed the *Palestinos*, a group of Colombian hit men who performed deliberately ordered executions in Colombia as well as New York, Chicago, and Miami.<sup>36</sup> The cartel's coercive capabilities, although not as overt as its rival, the Medellín cartel, undoubtedly contributed to its distinction in the 1980s and 1990s as a dangerous organization.

Meanwhile, the Medellín cartel emerged as arguably the most dangerous criminal organization in Colombian history. While Pablo Escobar used kidnapping to coerce his opponents, he preferred a policy of *plata o plomo* (silver or lead). His method was to bribe politicians, judges, or law enforcement, and if they did not accept the bribe (*plata*), they faced death (*plomo*).<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, Escobar and the Medellín cartel did not hesitate to eliminate those who interfered with their narco-activities, regardless of the targets' positions in Colombian society. The Medellín cartel was widely considered responsible for a number of high profile murders. In 1984, Escobar ordered the assassination of Colombian justice minister, Rodrigo Lara, for openly attacking Escobar's reputation.<sup>38</sup> In 1989, he ordered the assassination of Luis Carlos Galán, a front-running presidential

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<sup>34</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 23.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 49.

<sup>37</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 52.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 41.

candidate. Three months later, Escobar failed to assassinate Galan's successor, Cesar Gaviria, when he ordered the bombing of a commercial flight from Bogotá to Medellín.<sup>39</sup>

(2) Forcible Tax Collection. In the criminal world, tax collection typically comes in the form of extortion in exchange for protection or simply to keep the criminal organization from interfering with a legitimate individual or business's affairs. There is not much evidence to suggest that cartels in Colombia engaged in any noteworthy extortion activities. More than likely, the sheer volume of monetary profit involved in the drug trade made it unnecessary to extort the local populace. Furthermore, the cartels maintained a significant level of support from locals within their home "turf." Any extortion efforts would have likely weakened that support and detracted from a robust system of early warning against competitors and state efforts against the cartels.

(3) Destruction/Confiscation of Property. Similar to extortion, destruction and confiscation of property would have been activities detrimental to the cartels' drug operations. Other than attacks against each other and state organizations (which I discuss later in this chapter), the cartels avoided destructive efforts against their supporters.

#### ***b. Persuasion***

A second form of endogenous inputs comes from persuasive activities that seek to achieve the same desired effect as coercion, such as the gaining of active or passive complicity with a cartel's operations. According to Leites and Wolf, persuasion comes in multiple forms, including an identifiable ideology, discrediting authority, and various forms of payments.<sup>40</sup> The cartels pursued a combination of these to garner the necessary connivance of law enforcement, politicians, and the local populace.

(1) Ideological Persuasion. Despite the benefits of ideological persuasion, it was largely absent from Colombian cartel operations. Their goal was to grow in wealth and power rather than fight for a cause, thus ideological persuasion of those under their control was not a necessary component. Persuasive efforts against the state, however, were important in the cartels' campaign to appear as legitimate enterprises.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>40</sup> Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority*, 33.

(2) Discrediting of Established Authority. Both cartels dedicated a considerable amount of time, albeit through different strategies, to discredit the Colombian government. The Cali cartel, which sought a low-profile, consistently rejected any and all government accusations that the organization was a criminal operation. The godfathers of Cali maintained that they were nothing more than successful entrepreneurs. In a 1991 interview, Gilberto Rodríguez-Orejuela emphasized his claim as a legitimate and successful businessman. He coyly explained that his only crime was success.<sup>41</sup>

The Medellín cartel, however, used a much more direct approach in attempts to garner popular support and discredit the actions of the Colombian authorities. Pablo Escobar was a master manipulator of public opinion who became infamous for his formal letters to political and law enforcement leaders, including the U.S. Ambassador to Colombia. Recurring themes in his letters included accusations of terrorist actions committed by a puppet government, run by the United States.<sup>42</sup> According to Escobar, all actions of the state were taken against his “struggle” (a struggle he shared with the common man) to earn an honest living.<sup>43</sup> His efforts to delegitimize the government transcended his death, and he was mourned by thousands of rioting Colombians in Medellín.<sup>44</sup> Discrediting the government was key to his strategy, however words alone did not suffice. Rewards for support were a necessary part of success in the business of drug trafficking.

(3) Payments (Rewards). Colombian cartels frequently used bribery in persuading individuals to turn a blind eye to illegal activities. Unlike the violence of the Medellín cartel, the men from Cali believed they should *buy* Colombia rather than *terrorize* it.<sup>45</sup> Jorge Salcedo, a former member of the Cali cartel, explains that corruption is necessary to the growth and maintenance of cartel operations.<sup>46</sup> Salcedo continues that

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<sup>41</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 22.

<sup>42</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 187, 190, 193-194.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>45</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 68.

<sup>46</sup> Jorge Salcedo, “What I Saw Inside the Cali Drug Cartel,” *CNN*, January 18, 2012, accessed November 15, 2013, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/01/18/opinion/salcedo-first-person-account-drug-corruption/>.

“hundreds of high-ranking and lower-level police were on the [Cali] cartel’s secret payroll....From helicopter pilots to Generals.”<sup>47</sup> In 1989, a DEA report estimated that the Cali cartel bribed low-level CNP officers with \$1,550 per week, captains received \$5,000 per week, and generals received \$15,000 per week.<sup>48</sup> In addition to law enforcement, Salcedo describes the numerous judges and politicians who sold themselves to organized crime.<sup>49</sup> The Rodríguez-Orejuela brothers used their legitimate business holdings, including *Banco de Trabajadores* (Worker’s Bank) and media outlets to secure relationships with key politicians and media personalities.<sup>50</sup> Bribery efforts were largely successful and made it nearly impossible to penetrate the Cali cartel.

Additionally, the Medellín cartel regularly offered bribes to law enforcement and politicians to gain information on pending operations against the cartel’s leaders. Following the 1989 assassination of presidential candidate Luis Galán, the Colombian National Police organized an aggressive Search Bloc to bring the Medellín leaders to justice.<sup>51</sup> Colombian Colonel Hugo Martínez, commander of the task force, was offered \$6 million by Escobar through a retired police officer to ensure the Search Bloc was unsuccessful.<sup>52</sup> While the Colonel did not accept the bribe, it symbolized the resources Escobar and the cartel leaders could mobilize against their “enemies.” The multi-billion dollar drug industry afforded both cartels the ability to bribe law enforcement, political, and judicial leaders into compliance, an important advantage that would take years of concerted efforts to overcome.

### **c. Recruits**

One of the most important endogenous inputs of the Colombian cartels was the ability to recruit individuals to expand the footprint of drug operations. In their

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 94.

<sup>49</sup> Salcedo, “What I Saw Inside the Cali Drug Cartel.”

<sup>50</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 68–69.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 69.

recruitment strategy, cartels once again resorted to *plata o plomo*, silver or lead.<sup>53</sup> The silver represented attempts to recruit politicians, judges, and law enforcement personnel to their payroll. The Cali cartel placed a greater emphasis on *plata*, and its ability to “buy” individuals that were necessary to conduct operations; “spread the money around, and everyone accepts you.”<sup>54</sup> If *plata* was not sufficient, cartels recruited *sicarios* (paid hit men) to conduct kidnappings and executions of rival cartel members and political/law enforcement personnel who interfered with its business. The Medellín cartel relied on this latter strategy much more than the men from Cali.<sup>55</sup>

Additionally, cartels maintained a robust early warning system through the vast recruitment of passive support from the local populace, particularly within their respective home turfs of Cali and Medellín. In exchange for the many local business and job opportunities created by the cartels, locals provided the information advantage necessary to stay ahead of law enforcement activities.

#### ***d. Information***

Any information benefit gained by the cartels was largely unavailable to Colombian law enforcement. This lack of cooperation from the local populace made it quite difficult for Colombian law enforcement and supporting U.S. organizations to effectively target the cartels. Jerry Salameh, a DEA agent assigned to investigate the Cali cartel in the 1990s, explained that citizens of Cali would “look the other way, as the godfathers curried favor by spreading their wealth around town.”<sup>56</sup> Even the local police were notorious for ignoring cartel activities within their respective jurisdictions. In one

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<sup>53</sup> Associated Press, “Muerte de Pablo Escobar mató a los grandes carteles en Colombia [The death of Pablo Escobar killed the biggest cartels in Colombia],” December 2, 2013, [http://www.nacion.com/mundo/latinoamerica/Muerte-Escobar-grandes-carteles-Colombia\\_0\\_1381861849.html](http://www.nacion.com/mundo/latinoamerica/Muerte-Escobar-grandes-carteles-Colombia_0_1381861849.html).

<sup>54</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 68.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

example, the Cali cartel provided financial assistance to upgrade police posts around the city. In return, local law enforcement facilitated a “process of accommodation” that ensured no interference with cartel operations.<sup>57</sup>

In Medellín, the cartel managed an information advantage despite the challenges during an open war against the Colombian state. On one hand, the people of Medellín adored Pablo Escobar, and sought to inform him of any state activity against the cartel. Law enforcement, however, posed a slight challenge in gathering information. Bribery and staunch intimidation efforts, *plata o plomo*, successfully prompted complicity and information on any planned state action. An information advantage was key to the longevity of cartel operations. While they maximized efforts to self-sustain their respective organizations, there was a finite level of internal resources that could support the international expansion of cocaine distribution. This resulted in a necessary level of exogenous support to maintain the cartels within Colombia, while permitting a maturation into a global enterprise.

## **2. Exogenous Inputs**

### **a. Publicity**

An essential element in gaining support for drug trafficking operations was a robust information operation (IO) campaign emphasizing the cartels’ benign nature. In Colombia, there was a significant difference in the type and size of publicity efforts between the Cali and Medellín cartels. The Cali cartel sought a low profile from its early stages, attempting to focus publicity on its legitimate business enterprises as the source of its wealth. Miguel Rodríguez-Orejuela eventually put most of his efforts towards the cartel’s interests in real estate and a professional soccer team. The Cali cartel touted its legitimate character in Colombian courts, and through an unofficial alliance with the state against the Medellín cartel, claimed its only fear as upstanding citizens was the threat of attack from the Medellín cartel.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> James Brooke, “Cali, the ‘Quiet’ Drug Cartel, Profits by Accommodation,” *New York Times*, July 14, 1991, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/1991/07/14/world/cali-the-quiet-drug-cartel-profits-by-accommodation.html?pagewanted=all&src=pm>.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.



Pablo Escobar, on the other hand, was quite content to shine in the public spotlight. Throughout his battle with authorities, Escobar submitted public letters addressed to senior leaders within the Colombian government.<sup>59</sup> Concerned with his image, Pablo's publicity efforts ultimately allowed the state to keep a pulse on his whereabouts, activities, and planned operations.

Both cartels advertised their message through Colombian media outlets, who kept continuous coverage of the war against the cartels throughout the 1980s-1990s. The cartels secured various media personalities on their respective payrolls to ensure a positive spin on news about their activities. The Cali cartel founded the *Grupo Radial Colombia*, an association of local radio stations, as one of its legitimate business endeavors.<sup>60</sup> This benefited the cartel as a publicity outlet from which it could ensure positive press concerning its activities. Media outreach was only one form of necessary external support to the cartels. As production and distribution of cocaine expanded across the globe, other forms of external support became necessary.

#### ***b. Material***

The most notable form of material support came in the form of transportation and production hubs provided by international supporters. This obviously came at a steep financial price to the cartels. Compared to the growth in profit, however, it was a relatively small price to pay. A notorious example of material support was found in Nicaragua, where the Marxist Sandinista regime provided a secure air transportation hub for Medellín drug shipments.<sup>61</sup> External support served as a profound enabler in the expansion of transnational drug trafficking. The increased demand for cocaine and the subsequent profits afforded the cartels the ability to pay the necessary fees to secure such support.

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<sup>59</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 187, 190, 193.

<sup>60</sup> Fabio Castillo, "Los Jinetes de la Cocaína: Derechos Humanos en America Latina [The Riders of Cocaine: Human Rights in Latin America]," 2001, accessed December 7, 2013, <http://www.derechos.org/nizkor/colombia/libros/jinetes/index.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 49.

### 3. Conversion Mechanisms

The system includes various mechanisms that convert inputs into outputs. These include organization of personnel, financing, logistics, intelligence, and means of communication as essential functions to permit outputs of violence and intimidation in organized crime.<sup>62</sup>

#### a. *Personnel Organization*

In their early stages, both the Medellín and Cali cartels pursued a hub and spoke personnel network model, which internalized and centralized all stages of production and distribution of cocaine.<sup>63</sup> This allowed the leadership to maintain tight control over operations. As the cocaine business grew into a multinational enterprise, the Cali cartel adjusted the conduct of personnel interaction. The cartel recognized that a more compartmentalized strategy provided the necessary protection of operations if one cell was compromised. In addition, transit and storage was pushed out to neighboring Latin American countries. While the business became geographically decentralized, the central operational control maintained by the Cali cartel “executives” remained constant.<sup>64</sup> A DEA administrator, Thomas Constantine, explained that cartel leadership “control[ed] every aspect of the cocaine trade, from the amount of cocaine to be shipped on consignment, right down to the markings on each package.”<sup>65</sup> The Medellín cartel, however, never operated under the same compartmentalization. Drug trafficking, violence, and overt competition with the state were carried out by a hierarchical system.<sup>66</sup> While personnel organization and employment varied between the cartels, the flow of money was relatively similar.

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<sup>62</sup> Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority*, 35.

<sup>63</sup> H. Brinton Milward & Jörg Raab, “Dark Networks as Organizational Problems: Elements of a Theory,” *International Public Management Journal*, 9, no. 3. (2006): 340.

<sup>64</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 86.

<sup>65</sup> Ronald J. Ostrow, “DEA Details Cali Cartel’s Cocaine Distribution Network,” *LA Times*, September 26, 1994.

<sup>66</sup> Brooke, “Cali, the ‘Quiet’ Drug Cartel, Profits by Accommodation.”

***b. Financing***

The cocaine trade was a self-financing endeavor. Production and distribution was the single most profitable arm of cartel operations. In order to mask the mass profits of illegal drug operations, the cartels pursued an international money laundering scheme. Harold Wankel, former DEA agent, explained to Congress that without drug money, the traffickers could not finance any phase of their illegal trade. This included manufacturing, transportation, smuggling, and distribution—and even murder and bribery. Wankel continued that “drug money laundering organizations are essential to the cash flow” of cartel operations.<sup>67</sup>

Money laundering activities continuously evolved to evade the pursuit of U.S. and Colombian law enforcement. In 1985, the Cali cartel developed a complex scheme through the use of front companies who would push money through the Colombian National Bank in Miami. Another widely used conversion mechanism for illegal drug profits was the Colombian black market.<sup>68</sup> As a common form of commerce in the country, the black market easily converted illegal profits into legitimate currency. As business expanded, so did the marketplace for money laundering activities. By 1992, money laundering had expanded in the U.S., Panama, Costa Rica, Italy, Spain, Luxembourg, and a number of other European countries.<sup>69</sup> Parallel to the vast production of cocaine and corresponding cash profit, it was essential to maintain a deliberate logistics plan that protected the transfer of drugs and money across international borders.

***c. Logistics***

Transportation of cocaine was a constant game of cat and mouse, as the cartels made every effort to elude authorities and ensure the successful delivery of their illegal product. Both cartels used a variety of sophisticated drug smuggling techniques. Initially, the cartels focused on maritime transportation routes through the Caribbean to transfer cocaine. Concealment methods included false bottoms in legitimately containerized bulk

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<sup>67</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 93.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>69</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 100–101, 103.

maritime cargo.<sup>70</sup> Most routes headed towards Miami, the early hub of cocaine distribution into the United States. The Cali cartel concealed the bulk of cocaine inside containers and odd compartments aboard large cargo ships, making it difficult for law enforcement to interdict.<sup>71</sup> The Medellín cartel preferred bulk cocaine shipments to be quickly dropped at airstrips or even off loaded mid-flight into water sources, and retrieved by high-speed motor boats.<sup>72</sup>

By the end of the 1980s, U.S. interdiction efforts in the Caribbean forced the cartels to move the bulk of their transportation efforts to ground routes through México. The shift to México tapped into an already established web of rat lines that trafficked illegal immigrants and marijuana into the United States. By the early 1990s, roughly 80 percent of Colombian cocaine entered the United States through México.<sup>73</sup> Traffickers used all assets available, including private planes, trucks, and cars to cross the U.S.-Mexican border.<sup>74</sup> The constant challenges in logistics made the ability to gather accurate intelligence an essential component of cartel activities.

#### *d. Intelligence*

As already noted, the information advantage secured by the cartels was quite possibly the most important asset in their illicit operations. Intelligence efforts through bribery and intimidation of political leaders, judges, law enforcement, and the local populace successfully produced a robust early warning system. Cartels therefore knew of any attempts to attack the network well before the execution of such actions. Parallel to this increased reliance on accurate intelligence, the cartels exhausted their efforts to ensure the concealment of ‘business’ communications.

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<sup>70</sup> Drug Enforcement Agency, Intelligence Division, *The Cali Cartel: The New Kings of Cocaine* (Washington, DC: Drug Enforcement Agency, 1994).

<sup>71</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 110–111.

<sup>72</sup> William Cran, dir., *The Godfather of Cocaine*, online video, prod. William Cran and Stephanie Tepper (PBS documentary, March 25, 1997).

<sup>73</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 111.

<sup>74</sup> Ronald J. Ostrow, “DEA Details Cali Cartel’s Cocaine Distribution Network,” *LA Times*, September 26, 1994.

*e. Communications*

As the cartels grew in geographical space, so did the reliance on alternative methods to face-to-face communication. Coded telephone calls, faxes, and radio communications became the common methods of cartel communications.<sup>75</sup> Similarly, law enforcement technology allowed for communication intercepts, which required constant adjustment for the cartels to maintain their operational security. Once they discovered the capacity for law enforcement to monitor home and business phones, cartel members began to rely on pay phones. As law enforcement began tapping those as well, the cartels turned to faxes, then cell phones.<sup>76</sup> The ability to maintain discreet communication was crucial to all illicit operations. This complex system of trafficking efforts was widely successful. As a direct result, the cartels maintained the power and ability to plan and execute activities that protected their interests and expanded their operations. Next, I examine these activities as system outputs, or products, of the cartels.

**4. Outputs**

Aside from the massive monetary profits associated with the drug trade, there is a well-documented association with violent behavior. Many agree that the profits at stake are a direct cause for competition and violence amongst rivals in organized crime. Within the system, I evaluate outputs in terms of sabotage, violence against individuals, and small scale attacks aimed at law enforcement as well as rival cartels.

*a. Sabotage*

Although violence became a staple of the Colombian cartels, deliberate acts of sabotage were largely absent from their activities. The U.S. Department of Defense defines sabotage as “an act or acts with intent to injure, interfere with, or obstruct the *national defense* of a country....”<sup>77</sup> While the Medellín cartel committed acts directly

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<sup>75</sup> Drug Enforcement Agency, *The Cali Cartel: The New Kings of Cocaine*.

<sup>76</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 82.

<sup>77</sup> Department of Defense, *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Joint Publication 1-02) (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2013), 231.

aimed at the state, its objective was not to obstruct the national defense of Colombia, but rather to safeguard its illegal interests. This does not discount the extreme spike in violence at the height of cartel power in Colombia.

***b. Violence Against Individuals***

Violent acts against individuals were synonymous with the dangers involved in Colombian drug trafficking. While the Medellín cartel built a reputation as the more violent of the two major cartels, neither hesitated to resort to violent acts against competitors, politically appointed officials, or law enforcement if they deemed it necessary. One can argue that the ability to gather the information necessary to execute violent acts against individuals was only attainable through the profits gained from the drug trade itself.

From petty disputes and inter-cartel competition to high profile assassinations, both cartels accepted violence as necessary. Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel resorted to violent acts against any individual that stood in the way of “business” operations. Low-level criminals, state judges, even presidential candidates were not exempt from targeting and assassination.<sup>78</sup> The cartel relied on *sicarios* to carry out any act of violence against individuals. Correspondingly, the multi-billion dollar industry of drug trafficking allowed cartel leaders to pursue the most sensitive of targets; price and payment were not an issue.<sup>79</sup>

The Cali cartel acted in violence as a mode of last resort against state officials, but viewed violence as a mode of convenience when it involved the targeting of rival cartel members. In the early 1990s, the Cali cartel was accused of supporting *Los Pepes* (*Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar*—People Persecuted by Pablo Escobar), a group that vowed to retaliate against any of Escobar’s attacks that injured innocent people.<sup>80</sup> Reports indicated that *Los Pepes*’ deliberate targeting of Medellín cartel members was

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<sup>78</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 59.

<sup>79</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 68.

<sup>80</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 176.

financially backed by the Cali cartel.<sup>81</sup> Without the financial capital provided by the drug trade, both cartels would likely have been restricted in their ability to commit violent acts against individuals with such frequency.

**c. *Small-Scale Attacks***

In addition to the many assassinations, the use of other small scale attacks was a violent output almost exclusively reserved by the Medellín cartel. In 1989, at the height of his power, Escobar orchestrated the bombing of an Avianca Airliner, resulting in the death of 110 people.<sup>82</sup> On January 30, 1993, the Medellín cartel bombed a Bogotá bookstore with 220 pounds of dynamite.<sup>83</sup> Small-scale harassment attacks sought to deter law enforcement from pursuing the cartel leader, and offered Escobar a glimmer of hope that the Colombian state would come to an agreement with the cartels to end the bloodshed.

While the Cali cartel was not accused of actively participating in small-scale attacks, its support for *Los Pepes* suggested a level of complicity in more than mere assassinations. *Los Pepes* matched Escobar's bombings with small-scale attacks of its own, always aimed at Medellín cartel members or facilities. In retaliation for one of Escobar's car bombings, *Los Pepes* answered by destroying three *fincas* (estates) owned by the Escobar family.<sup>84</sup> Similar to the violence against individuals, the ability for either cartel to execute small scale attacks was a product of the wealth and power they obtained through drug trafficking operations. These attacks took their toll on the state, as law enforcement paid a heavy price in operations to rid Colombia of the violence.

**5. Effects on Authority**

At the height of cartel power and influence in Colombia, law enforcement faced a number of challenges in targeting the cartel networks. Two challenges exerted the greatest strain on progress by Colombian state security forces and their U.S. counterparts.

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 197.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 192.

First was the widespread corruption within Colombian politics and law enforcement through bribery and intimidation by the cartels. Next was the vast information advantage maintained by the cartels, particularly in their respective headquarters in Cali and Medellín. These challenges made it quite difficult for law enforcement to tangibly reduce violence and restore order.

The profits obtained through transnational drug operations allowed cartels to operate with virtual impunity for over a decade. Their operations were more or less impregnable—an undeniable byproduct of the ability to pay any price to individuals in exchange for compliance and a blind eye to illicit activity. Bribery served a number of benefits to cartel activities. The bribery of politicians provided the necessary means to sway state policy in favor of the cartels. For years, the Colombian government debated laws permitting extradition of drug kingpins to the United States; bribery of politicians stalled this debate for years.<sup>85</sup> Conversely, the bribery of law enforcement and members of the local population allowed for early warning of security operations. Subsequently, the majority of law enforcement operations aimed at the cartels resulted in the proverbial dry hole. This had a frustrating effect on law enforcement efforts and retarded any significant progress against the cartels.

Bribery of officials, coupled with the popularity of cartels in their home towns, offered an information advantage that continuously plagued law enforcement efforts. Even members of the CNP's Search Bloc, were not immune to bribery and intimidation.<sup>86</sup> This vast early warning network provided cartels with the necessary time and space to elude law enforcement operations and protect their business interests.

## **6. Effects on Future Endogenous Inputs**

The ability to act with impunity had a cyclic benefit for the cartels. Consequent to their growth in power and influence was an ability to conduct violence and intimidation

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<sup>85</sup> "Third Report on International Extradition Submitted to Congress Pursuant to Section 3203 of the Emergency Supplemental Act, 2000 as enacted in the Military Construction Appropriations Act, 2001, Public Law 106-246 Relating to Plan Columbia," *Digest of United States Practice in International Law 2001*, U.S. Department of State, <http://www.state.gov/s/l/16164.htm>.

<sup>86</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 174.



with greater effect. In turn, this allowed the cartels to better coerce and persuade individuals to comply with their demands. As a result, drug production and trafficking activities continued to grow for over a decade. There was, however, a threshold for violence within Colombia, and certain actions that exceeded that threshold were universally deemed intolerable by the majority of the Colombian populace. Understanding the system allowed security forces to identify those segments of the system that were most sensitive and vulnerable to attack.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

The pursuit of wealth and power through illicit drug trafficking created an environment where the cartels resorted to extreme violence and other coercive measures. Only after understanding the elements of this system could Colombian security forces begin to develop an effective counter-strategy to defeat them. The next chapter analyzes the approach taken by Colombian authorities and their U.S. counterparts in attacking this system to achieve what was deemed by many at the outset as an almost insurmountable task: the takedown of the Colombian cartels.

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### **III. COLOMBIA FIGHTS BACK: DEFEATING ORGANIZED CRIME**

In Colombia, the 1980s were defined by the burgeoning cocaine industry. It was a multi-billion dollar business that grew larger than anyone could have imagined. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Medellín and Cali cartels by 1989 had reached unprecedented levels of wealth and power. The Colombian government, pressured by the United States, adjusted law enforcement strategy in a focused effort to defeat organized crime. This chapter examines the combination of efforts that effectively targeted the most vital elements of the cartels' system.

Four main factors in law enforcement adjustments led to the fall of the Medellín cartel, quickly followed by its rivals in Cali. First, there was a shift in government policy, particularly with respect to extradition and negotiations with cartel leaders. Second there was a reorganization and professionalization of the CNP. Third, security forces accepted an increased level of active international support to combat cartel operations, particularly in counter-leadership targeting (kingpin strategy) from United States law enforcement and military forces. Last was clandestine cooperation with local vigilantes that provided the necessary information to target the core of cartel functions, particularly in personnel organization. The result was a dramatic reduction in the narco-violence that had plagued Colombia for almost two decades.

#### **A. EXCEEDING THE THRESHOLD: THE DEMISE OF THE MEDELLÍN CARTEL**

As the leader of the Medellín cartel, Pablo Escobar annually found himself on *Forbes Magazine's* list of the world's billionaires in the late 1980s.<sup>87</sup> Despite his economic power, his increasingly violent approach towards conflict with the Colombian state resulted in a series of high profile attacks that exceeded the government's threshold of tolerance for the cartel's illicit activities.

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<sup>87</sup> Associated Press, "Japan's Tsutsumi Still Tops Forbes' Richest List," *Los Angeles Times*, July 10, 1989.

## 1. Political Assassinations in Colombia

As I discussed in the previous chapter, cocaine use throughout the United States in the late 1970s provided an enormous financial opportunity for distributors in Colombia. The newfound fortunes of Colombian drug lords made for the growth of the cocaine industry, and all the problems that came with it. Pablo Escobar's spectacularly successful drug operations alarmed most Colombian politicians, however few had the courage to openly stand against his illegal activities. Beginning in 1983, one particular thorn in Escobar's side was the Colombian Minister of Justice, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. Lara made public what most politicians chose to ignore, that Escobar's wealth and political involvement was all sourced by illegal drug activities.<sup>88</sup> In April 1984, Escobar subsequently ordered Lara's assassination.<sup>89</sup> The murder of the country's Minister of Justice outraged Colombians and unmistakably identified the cartels as a threat to the Colombian state. As a result, the government accepted American assistance to combat the cartels' growth.<sup>90</sup> Additionally, then-president Belisario Betancur changed his position in favor of an extradition treaty with the United States, causing drug lords to flee Colombia in search of temporary asylum.<sup>91</sup> The Lara assassination was the first high-profile attack to prioritize the crackdown against the Medellín cartel.

As the 1980s continued, so too did drug profits and associated violence. By 1987, cartel intimidation efforts proved successful in persuading the Colombian Supreme Court to annul the extradition treaty with the United States.<sup>92</sup> Nonetheless, Escobar's actions would once again handcuff cartel operations. In 1989, he saw a significant threat in Luis Carlos Galan, a popular presidential candidate for the 1990 election. Galan was quite outspoken against the cartels and vowed to extradite cartel leaders upon his election as president.<sup>93</sup> In August of 1989, Escobar's *sicarios* assassinated Galan during a campaign

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<sup>88</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 36.

<sup>89</sup> "Thirty Years of America's Drug War: A Chronology," *Frontline*, PBS  
<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/drugs/cron/>.

<sup>90</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 42.

<sup>91</sup> "Thirty Years of America's Drug War: A Chronology," *Frontline*.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>93</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 58.

speech southwest of the nation's capital in Bogotá. Later that year, Escobar unsuccessfully attempted to kill Galan's successor, Cesar Gaviria, through the mid-flight bombing of an Avianca commercial airplane. While Gaviria was not on board, the attack killed 110 passengers, including two Americans.<sup>94</sup> In an instant, Escobar became the most wanted criminal in Colombia.

These attacks exceeded any threshold of tolerance or co-existence that the Colombian government was willing to accept. Similar to the Lara assassination, then President Virgilio Barco Vargas used executive powers to reestablish the extradition policy with the United States.<sup>95</sup> The killing of two Americans also made Escobar and the Medellín cartel legitimate military targets and triggered an active contribution from the United States Special Operations community.<sup>96</sup> While Escobar responded with several years of repeated bombings against government personnel, their families, and facilities, his actions resulted in an unwavering pursuit that slowly led to the attrition of his defenses and the cartel's eventual demise.

## **2. Colombian Response**

### ***a. Popular Sentiment Towards Escobar and the Medellín Cartel***

At the height of the Medellín cartel's dominance, the Colombian government maintained a relatively ambivalent attitude towards its activity. For many, the fear and intimidation exerted by the cartel was met with acceptance. Meanwhile, many people viewed Escobar as a modern day Robin Hood.<sup>97</sup> Lara's assassination in 1983, however, caused a major divide in popular opinion towards Escobar. The dramatic shift against him became even more evident after the 1989 assassination of Luis Galan. Escobar went from

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 59.

<sup>95</sup> "Thirty Years of America's Drug War: A Chronology," *Front Line*.

<sup>96</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 59.

<sup>97</sup> William Cran, *The Godfather of Cocaine*, PBS documentary, March 25, 1997.

controversial figure to public enemy number one.<sup>98</sup> This provided the necessary popular support for an aggressive law enforcement strategy to end the war with the Medellín cartel.

***b. Government Policy: Extradition as a Bargaining Chip***

The Colombian government knew that personnel within the cartel “system” were clearly organized through a centralized chain of command. While drugs and money travelled through a globally compartmentalized structure, all final approvals were made at the top.<sup>99</sup> Extradition was a frequent bargaining chip, as cartel leaders commonly preferred death in Colombia to imprisonment in the United States.<sup>100</sup> While the 1989 Avianca airline attack triggered then President Barco to reinstate the extradition treaty with the United States, his ambitions were short lived. The subsequent violence proved to be more than the government was willing to accept. As the Gaviria administration took office in 1990, the newly elected president issued a series of decrees that once again removed the possibility of extradition and reduced prison terms for cartel members who turned themselves in.<sup>101</sup> This provided another window of opportunity to reach a settlement with cartel leaders through diplomatic means.

By February 1991, a number of cartel members, including two of the four founding members of the Medellín cartel, accepted the government’s offer rather than continue a war against the state.<sup>102</sup> Although Gaviria’s concessions led to the surrender of several important members of the cartel, he couldn’t persuade Escobar to turn himself in. On June 19, 1991, Escobar successfully persuaded the Constitutional Assembly to prohibit extradition under guidelines of a revamped Colombian constitution.<sup>103</sup> On the

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<sup>98</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 59.

<sup>99</sup> Ostrow, “DEA Details Cali Cartel’s Cocaine Distribution Network.”

<sup>100</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 125.

<sup>101</sup> Stan Yarbrow, “Colombia Drug Cartel Leader Surrenders: Cocaine: Fabio Ochoa cites a government promise of no extradition,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1990.

<sup>102</sup> Ron Chepesiuk, *The War on Drugs: An International Encyclopedia* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1999), 165.

<sup>103</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 135.

same day, Escobar negotiated his surrender to authorities and was detained in a self-developed luxury prison called *La Catedral*.<sup>104</sup> Thirteen months later, Escobar escaped and resumed his battle against the state.

While the extradition of cartel leaders did not defeat the Medellín cartel, the threat of extradition proved to be a valuable bargaining chip for both sides. Although Escobar returned to hiding, the negotiated surrender of other prominent cartel leaders proved the importance of the extradition policy. After his escape, Escobar found himself isolated as his closest allies sat in Colombian prisons. Meanwhile, the CNP was reenergizing itself to capitalize on Escobar's weaknesses, and finally put an end to the Medellín cartel.

*c. Law Enforcement Strategy*

(1) *Bloque de Búsqueda*. In addition to the changes in extradition policy, Escobar's excessive behavior triggered a reorganization of the CNP. In 1989, the government created a 200-man police force called *Bloque de Búsqueda* (Search Bloc), which was dedicated to hunting down the leaders of the Medellín cartel. Escobar quickly placed a bounty on their heads, costing the lives of 30 uniformed Search Bloc officers within the first 15 days of operations. While the loss of human life was devastating, it stiffened the resolve of surviving CNP officers to defeat the cartel at all costs.<sup>105</sup>

The Search Bloc began conducting raids within Escobar's territory, the first of which narrowly missed capturing the drug kingpin.<sup>106</sup> Its subsequent efforts pressured the Medellín cartel, precipitating the most extreme levels of violence since the cartel's inception. While somewhat effective, the Search Bloc could not unilaterally achieve information parity with Escobar and his early warning system. Cooperation with the United States provided the necessary support to Colombian security forces and pressured the Medellín cartel into submission.

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>105</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 66-67.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 68.

(2) U.S. Assistance. The U.S. DEA began monitoring cartel activity as early as 1975.<sup>107</sup> Surveillance and interdiction focused within US borders, and little was executed on Colombian soil. The Avianca airline bombing of 1989 labeled Escobar and the Medellín cartel as direct threats to American citizens, and resulted in the deployment of the DEA and U.S. Special Operations Forces to support the Colombian government.<sup>108</sup>

These units played a vital role in filling a gap in operational intelligence and technical surveillance.<sup>109</sup> First, a unit code-named Centra Spike provided reconnaissance and surveillance aircraft as well as ground tracking capabilities to pinpoint the location of Medellín leadership. Additionally, elements of Delta Force were deployed to train, advise and assist the Search Bloc.<sup>110</sup> Its assistance provided the expertise that was lacking in CNP planning and execution of operations. While these U.S. forces enhanced the Search Bloc, they could not provide the necessary human intelligence to compete with the cartel's network of informants. Consequently, the Search Bloc sought covert support from a loose band of criminals named *Los Pepes* (*Perseguidos por Pablo Escobar/People persecuted by Pablo Escobar*).<sup>111</sup>

(3) Collaboration with *Los Pepes*. By the end of 1992, Escobar was the only founder of the Medellín cartel who remained alive and free. Meanwhile, his indiscriminate acts of violence had taken their toll on the population. As a response, *Los Pepes* developed in early 1993 as a homegrown vigilante movement, dedicated to retaliate against the Medellín cartel for terrorist acts that injured innocent civilians.<sup>112</sup> Officially, the Colombian government condemned the actions of *Los Pepes*, however the Search Bloc maintained clandestine ties to the vigilante group.<sup>113</sup> From the United States'

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<sup>107</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 17.

<sup>108</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 59.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>110</sup> "Killing Pablo," *CNN Presents*.

<sup>111</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 176.

<sup>112</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 145.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 146–147.



perspective, particularly the DEA and special mission units in Colombia, an indigenous vigilante group dedicated to eliminating its number one enemy provided an important means of weakening the cartel.<sup>114</sup>

*Los Pepes* proved its effectiveness in further isolating Pablo Escobar. By November 1993, the vigilantes assassinated 50 of Escobar's associates and destroyed roughly 20 properties belonging to members of the Medellín cartel. This home grown movement established an information advantage that the Search Bloc and supporting U.S. units could not gain, and resulted in the complete isolation of Escobar.

### **3. The End of Pablo Escobar**

On December 2, 1993, through the aid of U.S. signal intelligence capabilities, the Search Bloc killed Pablo Escobar in a small Medellín neighborhood.<sup>115</sup> While Escobar's death did not affect exports of cocaine to the United States, it succeeded in eliminating the largest source of violence within Colombia's borders.<sup>116</sup> The Medellín cartel ceased to exist, leaving a significant vacuum in the drug market; one that would be quickly filled by the Cali cartel.

## **B. LAST MEN STANDING: TARGETING THE CALI CARTEL**

The fall of Pablo Escobar eliminated the Cali cartel's main competition in the international cocaine trade. As the last men standing, the criminals from Cali took over any illicit operations that were vacated by the removal of the Medellín cartel. The Colombian government sought to build on its successes and turned its focus towards defeating the Cali cartel.

Members of the Colombian government pursued a more diplomatic approach against the Cali leadership. As a less violent criminal organization, the hatred that the CNP internalized against Escobar was not nearly as ubiquitous when targeting Cali personnel. This created obstacles that were overcome in a number of ways. First, the

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<sup>114</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 176.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 249

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 260.

United States increased pressure on the Colombian government to produce tangible results in disrupting the cartel's operations. Second, the appointment of General Rosso José Serrano revolutionized the CNP and largely reduced corruption within the ranks. Finally, a growing number of cartel informants provided the necessary intelligence to effectively target the cartel system and bring the organization to its knees.

## **1. U.S. Pressure**

In the eyes of U.S. officials, the elimination of the Medellín threat was only part of the equation. In December 1991, DEA officials discovered that more than 15 tons of cocaine was concealed by Cali associates<sup>117</sup> in cement posts and transported through Miami ports.<sup>118</sup> To avoid stiff prison sentences, those arrested began cooperating with U.S. officials and corroborated information that identified Cali leadership as responsible for all cartel operations.<sup>119</sup> The U.S. government subsequently applied pressure on numerous Colombian administrations to dismantle the Cali cartel. Unsatisfied with Colombia's efforts, in 1994 the United States revoked Colombia's eligibility to receive foreign aid.<sup>120</sup> The Colombian government was forced to reorganize the CNP and put forth a serious effort to defeat the Cali cartel.

## **2. Reorganizing the Colombian National Police**

The cartel's most effective means of eliminating law enforcement interference with its drug operations was through bribery. U.S. pressure facilitated the appointment of an honest and dedicated officer to purge the CNP of corruption and professionalize the force into a respected and capable organization.

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<sup>117</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 158.

<sup>118</sup> Drug Enforcement Agency, "Drug Enforcement Agency: 1990–1994," accessed January 20, 2014, [www.justice.gov/dea/about/history/1990-1994.pdf](http://www.justice.gov/dea/about/history/1990-1994.pdf), 86.

<sup>119</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 159, 167, 169.

<sup>120</sup> Charles Krause, "Colombia's Samper and the Drug Link," *PBS Newshour* [Transcript], March 20, 1996, [http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin\\_america/colombia\\_3-20.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/colombia_3-20.html).

*a. General Serrano*

In 1994, Ernesto Samper appointed General Rosso José Serrano as commander of the CNP. While Serrano continued the fight against drug trafficking, he also sought to eliminate police corruption and establish a framework of institutional reform within the organization.<sup>121</sup> Over time, the combination of Serrano's priorities improved the CNP's reputation, popular support, and results against the Cali cartel.

General Serrano recognized that internal corruption contributed to the difficulties in targeting the Cali cartel. He instituted a controversial cleansing of the force, removing almost 8,000 police officers between 1995 and 2000.<sup>122</sup> While their removal did not completely eliminate corruption within the force, most accepted Serrano's policy as a genuine effort to purge the rampant corruption that had previously characterized the CNP. Under Serrano's command, complaints about police corruption were reduced and the force was able to place a greater focus on its Cali operations.<sup>123</sup> Though the threat of operational compromise still existed, this no longer encompassed every operation against the cartel.

Serrano also reorganized the management structure of the force. He initiated a program of professional education to develop the managerial and leadership skills of police officers.<sup>124</sup> Additionally, Serrano coordinated joint training programs with a number of U.S. units, including the DEA, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Marine Corps, and Army Special Forces.<sup>125</sup> The professionalization of the CNP notably enhanced its effectiveness, allowed for fundamental changes within the organization, and ultimately produced a more effective force.

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<sup>121</sup> "Asumió Nuevo Director de la Policía: 'Soy un Guerrero del Narcotráfico' [The New Chief of Police: 'I am a Warrior of Narco-trafficking']," *El Tiempo*, December 7, 1994.

<sup>122</sup> María Victoria Llorente, "Demilitarization in Times of War? Police Reform in Colombia," *Public Security and Police Reform in the Americas* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2005), 197.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 198.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 199.

<sup>125</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 201.

***b. Cooperation with the DEA***

The CNP could not suspend its pursuit of the Cali cartel in order to institute Serrano's changes. Concurrent to the organization's reform, Serrano formally moved the now 500-man Search Bloc headquarters to Cali in order to focus on defeating the cartel.<sup>126</sup> The Search Bloc, advised by a two-man team from the DEA, initially conducted a series of raids against Cali leadership with little success. Similar to the Medellín cartel, Cali's early warning system extended through street vendors, hotel clerks, and thousands of taxi drivers; gaining reliable, actionable intelligence was extremely difficult.<sup>127</sup> Security forces had to penetrate the system and attack Cali's intelligence network.

The U.S. deployed high-tech audio intercept ground equipment and aircraft to enhance the surveillance capabilities of Colombian forces.<sup>128</sup> Its intercepts were essential in intelligence gathering activities as well as building criminal cases against cartel members. The combination of intelligence capabilities, Search Bloc raids, and psychological operations in the form of leaflets and monetary awards began to take a toll on cartel leadership. Worried about internal betrayal, they ordered the murder of roughly 75 people within a six-week period. Regardless of the spike in violence, the information network continued to grow. In June 1995, the CNP and its DEA counterparts captured Gilberto Rodríguez-Orejuela.<sup>129</sup> This marked the first major victory against the Cali cartel and signaled a shift in balance that put remaining cartel leaders on the run.

Law enforcement efforts against drug traffickers on U.S. soil compounded the pressure on Cali operations. The arrest and indictment of Cali operatives in Miami placed dozens of new potential informants in the hands of authorities. In addition, Colombian-based operatives viewed the CNP's decision to capture (not kill) Gilberto Rodríguez as a sign that they could negotiate surrender and work with the government.<sup>130</sup> The growing number of high level informants proved too much for the remaining Cali leadership to

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 203.

<sup>127</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 206.

<sup>128</sup> "Killing Pablo," *CNN Presents*.

<sup>129</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 207, 211.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 218.

contend with. In July 1995, authorities arrested José Santacruz-Londoño while dining in a Bogotá restaurant.<sup>131</sup> One month later, a joint raid of DEA, CNP, and Colombian Navy SEALs resulted in the arrest of the cartel's true kingpin, Miguel Rodríguez.<sup>132</sup> The cartel was essentially decapitated; the Colombian government had succeeded in taking down the largest drug enterprise in the country's history.

In all, the top seven members of the Cali leadership were either arrested or surrendered within a span of three months. Heavy pressure through constant raids and non-kinetic activities such as leaflets and monetary reward offers influenced a number of cartel members to negotiate with government officials rather than continue a life on the run. A criminal-friendly extradition policy further enticed cartel members to surrender and begin cooperation with security forces. Finally, the robust human intelligence network and multi-national cooperation triggered the collapse of the Cali cartel's empire.

### C. CONCLUSION

The elimination of these large cartels failed to eliminate international cocaine trafficking and distribution. More accurately, their removal reduced widespread violence and a relative lack of government control. From this perspective, Colombia developed and executed a "successful" law enforcement model that reined in violent organized crime. This was reflected in both law enforcement reform and the targeting of specific elements of the cartel's conversion mechanisms. First, security forces recognized that both cartels maintained a centralized structure. In both cases, a kingpin strategy targeted respective leadership through kinetic and non-kinetic means. A flexible extradition policy facilitated the surrender of various leaders, and enabled law enforcement to gain valuable information from turned informants to conduct lethal operations with increased effectiveness. Second, the creation of a professional force dedicated to the removal of the cartels was necessary to mitigate corruption and avoid compromising operational security. By protecting its own information, Colombian law enforcement indirectly

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<sup>131</sup> Drug Enforcement Agency, "Arrest of Cali mafia leader José Santacruz-Londoño," <http://www.justice.gov/dea/pubs/pressrel/pr950705.htm>, July 5, 1995.

<sup>132</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet and the Bribe*, 228.

affected the cartels' ability to convert information on security forces into valuable intelligence to protect their operations. Third, U.S. assistance provided unique training and intercept capabilities to effectively target the cartels' intelligence and communications mechanisms. A variety of means (human intelligence, signal intelligence, information operations, etc.) allowed security forces to infiltrate the cartels' network. Last, and most effective, was the cooperation with *Los Pepes*. This relationship provided an unprecedented gateway to information that weakened the cartels' personnel structure and isolated leadership.

Unfortunately, the resultant power vacuum opened a window of opportunity for other transnational organized crime syndicates to form and grow in power. Mexican cartels assumed control of drug trafficking activity and adjusted their structure to fulfill all elements vacated by the Colombians. The next chapter analyzes México's cartels as a system of inputs and outputs in order to illuminate their similarities and differences from the Colombians. This will, in turn, help determine the applicability of a Colombian law enforcement model to contemporary México.

## IV. MÉXICO: A DANGEROUS PATH

### A. INTRODUCTION

Some concerned observers suggest that México has been heading down a dangerous path linked to organized crime. From this point of view, the criminal violence once synonymous with the Medellín and Cali cartels of Colombia now poses a threat to Mexican authorities. The demise of the large Colombian cartels in the 1990s reduced extreme levels of violence, but did little to eliminate the global demand for narcotics. As the world's largest consumer of illegal drugs, the United States maintained the demand that allowed criminal organizations in México to assume any operational void in illicit drug supply into the twenty-first century.<sup>133</sup>

To defeat organized crime, some have suggested that México should apply the Colombian law enforcement model that defeated the cartels of Medellín and Cali. Others suggest that a cookie-cutter approach is misguided and contextually inaccurate. The first step to determine if Colombia's model applies is to evaluate the functional elements of México's cartel system. How does it compare to the Colombian system? Only then can one assess the suitability of a Colombian law enforcement model to the dynamics of México's criminal environment.

In December 2006, President Felipe Calderón launched federal police and military units in operations against cartels in nine of México's 32 states.<sup>134</sup> The cartels responded with a wave of violence and territorial disputes that continue to affect the country in 2014.<sup>135</sup> Today, regionally-based cartels control the majority of illicit

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<sup>133</sup> William Dean et. al., "The War on Mexican Cartels: Options for U.S. and Mexican Policy-Makers," *Institute of Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 2012), 7.

<sup>134</sup> Colleen W. Cook, *CRS Report for Congress: México's Drug Cartels* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2007), ii.

<sup>135</sup> Dean et. al., "The War on Mexican Cartels," 8.

operations within México's borders.<sup>136</sup> This chapter examines these cartels as a system of inputs and outputs. While I examine all of México's cartel activity, I focus on three of the country's most menacing cartels.

In early 2014, Mexican security forces prioritized their efforts against the Sinaloa cartel, *Los Zetas*, and the Knights Templar (*Los Caballeros Templarios*).<sup>137</sup> Each cartel maintains its operations through a complex system of inputs and outputs. Notwithstanding, this model appropriately dissects the inputs that allowed cartels to sustain their current levels of influence, explains the conversion mechanisms that contribute to operations, and outlines their subsequent outputs.

## **B. CARTEL BACKGROUND**

One of México's most potent criminal organizations (with a long history) operates from the Pacific-northwestern coastal state of Sinaloa, and accounts for roughly 25% of drugs that enter the United States. The Sinaloa cartel is currently led by Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán Loera, who is annually recognized by *Forbes Magazine* as one of the most powerful people in the world.<sup>138</sup> Mexican authorities arrested El Chapo in February 2014; what exactly his arrest means for the day-to-day operation of the Sinaloa cartel remains unclear. Nonetheless, the cartel is considered by U.S. intelligence services to be México's most powerful criminal organization.<sup>139</sup> Reportedly established in 1990 with deep roots in Sinaloa and other parts of the Pacific coast,<sup>140</sup> the Sinaloa cartel's control of drug trafficking and other illicit activity extends through 17 states, from the northern cities of Tijuana and Juarez along the western coast of México.<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>136</sup> Marinas Fuerzas Especiales de México, "Los Cáteles Mexicanos" [The Mexican Cartels] (Mexico: Las Marinas Fuerzas Especiales de México [Marine Special Forces of Mexico], 2011).

<sup>137</sup> Anonymous (a), Mexican military officer, January 29, 2014, interview with the author.

<sup>138</sup> Dolia Estevez, "World's Most Powerful Drug Dealer Joaquin 'El Chapo' Guzman Makes a Mockery of U.S. Law Enforcement," *Forbes Magazine*, November 2013.

<sup>139</sup> Marinas Fuerzas Especiales de México, "The Mexican Cartels."

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

<sup>141</sup> Stratfor Global Intelligence, "Mexican Cartels: Sinaloa Federation," February 28, 2013, accessed February 4, 2014, <http://www.stratfor.com/video/mexican-cartels-sinaloa-federation>.



Meanwhile in terms of violence, experts consider *Los Zetas* to be México's most threatening criminal organization.<sup>142</sup> Formed in the mid-1990s as a paramilitary wing of the Gulf cartel, *Los Zetas* was originally composed of defectors from México's Special Forces.<sup>143</sup> Between the years 2008–2010, the group fragmented from the Gulf cartel and established its own illicit operations. It currently controls drug corridors from northeast México that extend south along the country's east coast and into Central America. Although *Los Zetas* leader, Miguel Angel Treviño Morales, was apprehended by Mexican military forces in July 2013, the cartel continues its reputation for violence and intimidation that sets it apart from its rivals.<sup>144</sup>

Another criminal organization that has risen to prominence in recent years is the Knights Templar cartel, located in México's southwestern state of Michoacán. Following a series of effective raids against *La Familia Michoacána* cartel in late 2010, the Knights Templar fragmented from *La Familia* and gained control of a significant portion of illegal operations in Michoacán.<sup>145</sup> The recent emergence of organized vigilante groups against the Knights Templar has reduced its influence, but the associated violence has gained international attention and made targeting the cartel a priority for the Mexican government.<sup>146</sup> These cartels represent a relevant sample of the influence of modern organized crime in México. A study of its structure allows one to compare and contrast these modern-day cartels to its Colombian predecessors.

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<sup>142</sup> Anonymous (a), Mexican military officer, January 29, 2014, interview with the author.

<sup>143</sup> Kazi Stastna, "The Cartels behind México's Drug War," *CBC News*, August 28, 2011, accessed February 6, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/the-cartels-behind-México-s-drug-war-1.1036931>.

<sup>144</sup> Elliott C. McLaughlin, "Treviño's Los Zetas Known for 'Complete Absence of Scruples,' Expert Says," *CNN*, July 7, 2013, accessed February 6, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/07/16/world/americas/trevino-los-zetas-profile/>.

<sup>145</sup> Marinas Fuerzas Especiales de México, "Los Cáteles Mexicanos."

<sup>146</sup> Thom Walker, "Fear and Respect: On the Trail of a Mexican Drug Lord," *Channel 4 News (UK)*, January 28, 2014, accessed February 7, 2014, <http://www.channel4.com/news/México-drug-cartel-la-tuta-servando-gomez-knights-templar>.

## C. THE CARTEL SYSTEM

### 1. Endogenous Inputs

#### a. Coercion

Similar to our analysis of Colombia's cartels in Chapter II, I first examine endogenous inputs in the form kidnapping and murder, illegal tax collection, and destruction of property.<sup>147</sup>

(1) Kidnapping, Assassinations, Torture. Inherent in the day-to-day operations of México's cartels is perpetual violence and insecurity in areas in which they operate. From 2006-2010, cartel assassins murdered more than 2,500 policemen, soldiers, judges, and politicians.<sup>148</sup> Furthermore, a government study found that in the same period, the country's kidnapping rate increased over 300 percent.<sup>149</sup> Currently, *Los Zetas* represent the most vicious form of violent behavior in México with repeated kidnappings and acts of mass murder. The Knights Templar also resort to torture and extreme violence against locals who refuse to comply with its demands.<sup>150</sup> The group's outrageous behavior includes kidnapping, raping, and the killing of innocents, particularly in the state of Michoacán.<sup>151</sup> The Sinaloa cartel can be very vicious; however, its approach to violence tends to be more discreet.<sup>152</sup> It prohibits kidnapping on its home turf, only permitting such activity against rivals in other parts of México.<sup>153</sup>

Much of the violence is aimed at coercing rival cartels. In March 2009, the Sinaloa cartel reportedly dumped a collection of dismembered bodies in *Zeta* territory with a message signed "Sincerely, El Chapo."<sup>154</sup> Meanwhile, the very emergence of *Los*

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<sup>147</sup> Leites and Wolf, *Rebellion and Authority*, 32.

<sup>148</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 11.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>150</sup> Ioan Grillo, "Mexican Vigilantes Beat Back Ruthless Knights Templar Cartel," *Time Magazine*, January 29, 2014, accessed February 15, 2014, <http://world.time.com/2014/01/29/México-vigilantes-knights-templar-cartel-Michoacán/>.

<sup>151</sup> George Grayson, "Mayhem in Michoacán," *E-Notes*, Foreign Policy Research Institute, February 2014, <http://www.fpri.org/articles/2014/02/mayhem-michoacan-mexico>.

<sup>152</sup> Patrick Radden Keefe, "Cocaine Incorporated," *New York Times Magazine*, June 15, 2012, 7.

<sup>153</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 265.

<sup>154</sup> Keefe, "Cocaine Incorporated," 10.

*Zetas* and the Knights Templar was a product of inter-cartel violence. The level of violence is, to a certain degree, a result of the syndicates' respective positions in the overall order of organized crime, and their desire to rise up the totem pole. A "shared" commitment to criminal violence, however, is only one element of an increasingly diverse criminal system. Another growing initiative of numerous cartels is the extortion of legitimate businesses within the cartels' respective areas of control.

(2) Forcible Tax Collection. México's cartels developed a proclivity for forced taxing and other forms of extortion. *Los Zetas* are notorious for rampant extortion of individuals and businesses large and small.<sup>155</sup> Similarly, the Knights Templar disrupt the daily activities of average civilians within areas under its control. Farmers are forced to pay quotas for the production of their crops while providing the cartel with discounted prices. In many instances, its extortion scheme has turned local economies upside down.<sup>156</sup> Even Catholic priests are no longer immune to extortion efforts. In December 2013, cartel members threatened the country's main Catholic seminary in México City with payment demands.<sup>157</sup>

In contrast to its rivals, the Sinaloa cartel largely avoids extortion activity and focuses on drug trafficking operations.<sup>158</sup> Enough profit can be earned through the complicity of locals in drug production and transportation. Often more than complicity, large parts of Sinaloa are tied to drug trade, whether it be through familial ties or various forms of employment.<sup>159</sup> Forced extortion threatens to anger the population and adversely impacts Sinaloa activity. Nonetheless, forcible taxing has become a significant issue in México. Should locals resist, they face a credible threat of the confiscation or complete destruction of their property.

(3) Destruction/Confiscation of Property. Cartels typically resort to the confiscation or destruction of property, particularly in turf wars with rival cartels or local

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>156</sup> Grillo, "Mexican Vigilantes Beat Back Ruthless Knights Templar Cartel."

<sup>157</sup> Rafael Romo and Catherine E. Shoichet, "Archbishop: Mexican Cartel Threatened Catholic Seminary," *CNN*, December 3, 2014, accessed March 18, 2014, <http://www.cnn.com/2013/12/03/world/americas/Mexico-cartel-catholic-seminary-extortion/>.

<sup>158</sup> Keefe, "Cocaine Incorporated," 7.

<sup>159</sup> Anonymous (b), Mexican military officer, January 29, 2014, interview with the author.

residents and business owners who refuse to comply with demands. The Sinaloa cartel engages in numerous inter-cartel battles to facilitate the expansion of illicit activities. The cartel does not hesitate to attack local businesses affiliated with its rivals, destroying these establishments with firebombs, grenades, and small-arms attacks to confiscate contested territory.<sup>160</sup> In other examples, the cartels directly target the local population. The Knights Templar force those indebted to the cartel to officially sign over the titles to their homes.<sup>161</sup> Local farms are confiscated as well and used as an additional source of income. Coercive violence remains a significant problem in México. Recognizing that non-violent behavior can be just as useful, cartels include various non-kinetic contributions in persuading others to comply with their demands.

***b. Persuasion***

(1) Ideological Preparation. Similar to Colombia's cartel structure, there is a general absence of any specific ideology that drives the organizations' activities. Notwithstanding, the cartels emphasize their religious affiliation, no matter how contradictory it might be to their actions. It is impossible to ignore the religious undertones within a country where 88% of the population considers themselves to be at least nominally Catholic.<sup>162</sup> While for most cartels, Catholicism is a mere extension of the greater Mexican culture, one particular cartel promotes a relatively extreme ideology that guides the framework for the cartel's existence.

The Knights Templar cartel promulgates certain spiritual beliefs within the communities that it controls. It draws from the ideological beliefs of *La Familia* cartel's deceased founder, Nazario Moreno, who published his principles in a book called *Mis Pensamientos (My Thoughts)*.<sup>163</sup> Ironically, Moreno propagates a belief in humility,

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<sup>160</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 121.

<sup>161</sup> Grillo, "Mexican Vigilantes Beat Back Ruthless Knights Templar Cartel."

<sup>162</sup> U.S. Department of State, "México: International Religious Freedom Report 2006," Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor, accessed March 9, 2014, <http://www.state.gov/j/drl/rls/irf/2006/71467.htm>.

<sup>163</sup> Grillo, "Mexican Vigilantes Beat Back Ruthless Knights Templar Cartel."

honesty, generosity, and love of God.<sup>164</sup> The Knights Templar reveres its deposed leader in various shrines, advertising themselves as disciples of his word. Its current leader, Servando “La Tuta” Gomez, organizes the cartel under these tenets and vows to “fight materialism, injustice, and tyranny.”<sup>165</sup>

Formal indoctrination of religious beliefs is relatively distinct to the Knights Templar cartel. The Sinaloa cartel simply operates as a profit-driven corporation, while *Los Zetas* pursue a reputation for ruthlessness. Fundamental to the latter organization is the belief that “if you frighten your enemy enough, you may defeat him without having to fight.”<sup>166</sup> Although there is no over-arching ideology in cartel activity, most cartels recognize a need for some fundamental framework from which to promote and distinguish their respective organizations.

(2) Discrediting of Established Authority. Inherent in the activities of illicit organizations is the opposing force of legitimate government authority. Cartels attempt to discredit the practices of government authority in order to secure popular support within their respective environments.

Cartels use propaganda and media as publicity tools and means of slander at every opportunity against legitimate authority. In 2009, “La Tuta” Gomez of the Knights Templar professed that the cartel’s fight is not against Mexican citizens, but aimed at the federal police who attack its families.<sup>167</sup> Later that year, a cartel-sponsored demonstration in Michoacán displayed a banner that stated “The people are tired of this military invasion. We are living in a state of siege.”<sup>168</sup> In December 2013, *Los Zetas* posted banners in Ciudad Victoria Tamaulipas after hosting a Christmas party for local families. The banners read “the government has behaved irresponsibly in Ciudad Victoria by not

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<sup>164</sup> Humberto Padgett, “Nazario, el apóstol del narco” [Nazario, the Apostle of Drug Dealers], *Emequis*, April 16, 2012, accessed February 15, 2014, <http://www.m-x.com.mx/xml/pdf/278/36.pdf>.

<sup>165</sup> Grayson, “Mayhem in Michoacán.”

<sup>166</sup> Samuel Logan, “A Profile of Los Zetas: México’s Second Most Powerful Drug Cartel,” *CTC Sentinel* 5, no. 2 (2012), 5.

<sup>167</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 202.

<sup>168</sup> Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel*, 50.

providing gifts and happiness to children in need.”<sup>169</sup> These are only a few examples of a common practice in cartel operations. From Monterrey to Michoacán, cartels assist in public demonstrations against authorities.<sup>170</sup> It frustrates the efforts of politicians and security forces to win over regional populations. To reinforce the efforts of banner propaganda, cartels utilize another form of non-kinetic persuasion: bribery.

(3) Rewards (Payments). The cartels use monetary payments as both a form of bribery and a rewards system for violence. Bribery is a necessary component of every cartel’s operations. The corruption associated with bribery has plagued Mexican society and its governing powers for decades. México’s ruling political party, the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), dominated twentieth century politics in México through a reliance on corruption and payoffs at all levels of governance and security to maintain a relative peace.<sup>171</sup>

The current drug war suggests that no inroads have been made to previous norms in corruption and bribery. México’s former Public Safety Secretary, Genaro Garcia Luna, estimated that cartels spend upwards of \$1.2 billion a year on bribery efforts.<sup>172</sup> The Sinaloa cartel commonly bribes authorities at the municipal, state, and federal level. Politicians, prosecutors, law enforcement, military, customs officials (U.S. and Mexican), and even national-level leadership have accepted bribes; no one is immune. “El Chapo” Guzman built his power base while incarcerated, as he bribed officials for preferential treatment and ultimately, to aid in his 2001 escape from a maximum security prison.<sup>173</sup> Even the country’s former drug czar (director of anti-drug policies), Noe Ramirez, was formally charged in 2008 with receiving monthly bribes of \$450,000.<sup>174</sup> Bribery is a systemic issue that is crucial to the success of cartel operations.

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<sup>169</sup> “Mexican Drug Cartels Host Holiday Parties in Tamaulipas,” *OE Watch*, February 2014, accessed March 19, 2014, [http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/OEWatch/201402/Mex\\_01.html](http://fmso.leavenworth.army.mil/OEWatch/201402/Mex_01.html).

<sup>170</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 206.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>174</sup> Keefe, “Cocaine Incorporated,” 6.

In addition to bribery, cartel leaders reward violent acts conducted by paramilitary and low-level cartel operatives. Most disturbing is that estimates suggest that a murder typically costs a cartel 1,000 pesos, or roughly \$85.<sup>175</sup> The absurdly low rate explains how desperate low-level *sicarios* are to earn a paycheck. Furthermore, it suggests that the multi-billion dollar industry that is the Mexican drug trade will not run dry of willing assassins in the foreseeable future. Coercive violence, rampant extortion, distorted ideology and aggressive bribery tactics all contribute to the Mexican cartel system, and provide the necessary space to conduct illicit operations.

*c. Recruits*

*Los Zetas* are well known as defectors from the Mexican Army's Special Forces, who initially served as a paramilitary wing of the Gulf cartel. After fragmenting into its own entity, *Los Zetas* leadership used military contacts in Guatemala's Special Forces, *Los Kaibiles*, to expand its size and area of operations. Clandestine recruitment channels allowed new recruits to attend training camps that ensured a "professional" edge in violence against its rivals.<sup>176</sup> The associated reputation serves as a recruitment in itself, as *Los Zetas* even advertise with banners hung from bridges suggesting "the Zetas operations group wants you, soldier or ex-soldier."<sup>177</sup>

The Sinaloa cartel recruits from existing gangs from the United States to South America. The reputed *Mara Salvatrucha* (MS-13) affiliates from El Salvador and Honduras provide an intimidating arm to transport drugs and battle with security forces and rival cartels on behalf of the Sinaloa cartel.<sup>178</sup>

The Knights Templar recruit in part by suggesting it is an honorable and religious cause that is dedicated to the hope of a better life. This theme appeals to potential recruits in poverty-stricken Michoacán.<sup>179</sup> The violent nature of organized crime makes for a

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<sup>175</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 165.

<sup>176</sup> Samuel Logan, "A Profile of Los Zetas: México's Second Most Powerful Drug Cartel," 5.

<sup>177</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 104–105.

<sup>178</sup> *Ibid.*, 102.

<sup>179</sup> Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel*, 11.

relatively large turnover in personnel. Unfortunately, a grim economic situation in rural México ensures a plentiful pool of young men on which the cartels continuously focus their recruiting efforts.

**d. Information**

Another important input in organized crime is a sustained advantage in information on the environment, rivals, and security force activity. Bribery of local law enforcement is crucial in gaining an information advantage against adversaries. *Los Zetas* employ local security forces on its payroll to the extent that police not only turn a blind eye to illicit activity, but actively participate in murder and kidnapping.<sup>180</sup>

Another method of information gathering is found in the employment of the local populace. Locals have intimate knowledge of their surroundings and can provide early warning of any out of the ordinary activity. A segment of the local populace that cartels consider particularly valuable are females. As Ioan Grillo explains, women are used to create spy networks to gather information on “rivals, police, politicians, or anything the cartel wants to find out about,” providing an edge on competition and a step ahead of law enforcement efforts to defeat them.<sup>181</sup>

Finally, cartels understand the need to protect sensitive information regarding their activities. They punish potential turncoats in an effort to deter other potential informants from cooperating with law enforcement.<sup>182</sup> An information advantage is crucial to the sustainment of illicit operations and ultimately, cartel survival.

**2. Exogenous Inputs**

**a. Publicity**

Cartels recognize that to sustain their activities, some inputs must be derived from external sources. Public outreach through both technical and rudimentary means provide a platform to propagate the cartels’ agenda. In an age of global reach and cyber

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<sup>180</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 104.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 226.



capabilities, the cartels adopted internet media outlets to intimidate rivals, deter potential informants, and promote their respective organizations. *Los Zetas* occasionally use social media such as YouTube to promulgate its violent behavior.<sup>183</sup> Members of the Knights Templar post provocative images that glorify its activities and boast of its status as a band of ruthless assassins.<sup>184</sup> “La Tuta” Gomez appears in numerous television interviews to justify his cartel’s existence as a necessary evil.<sup>185</sup> He once even phoned in to a popular television program to explain that his cartel was protecting the people of Michoacán from corrupt politicians and the threat of *Los Zetas*.<sup>186</sup> Through bribery and intimidation, cartels influence the message and commentary of media outlets.<sup>187</sup>

Another form of publicity comes in the form of song. The narco-culture is glorified through many *narcocorridos*, or drug ballads. One of the most well-known bands of northern México, *Grupo Cartel de Sinaloa*, dedicates its music to the lore of the Sinaloa cartel.<sup>188</sup> *Narcocorridos* are so influential that the Mexican government has banned such music on public radio.<sup>189</sup> Despite the government’s efforts, the lyrics connect with rural communities and celebrate the cartels’ activity.

While technology and media provide access to a wider population base, rudimentary publicity remains an important aspect of the cartels’ information operations. Cartels hang “narco-banners” from bridges and hand out flyers throughout their respective areas of control.<sup>190</sup> Images of these banners are captured in newspapers and

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<sup>183</sup> Keefe, “Cocaine Incorporated,” 7.

<sup>184</sup> Deborah Hastings, “Mexican Cartels Use Social Media to Post Gruesome Victim Photos,” *New York Daily News*, December 16, 2013, accessed February 17, 2014, <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/mexican-drug-cartel-thugs-post-atrocities-social-media-article-1.1515860>.

<sup>185</sup> Walker, “Fear and Respect: On the Trail of a Mexican Drug Lord.”

<sup>186</sup> Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel*, 28.

<sup>187</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 74.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, 179–180.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>190</sup> Hannah Stone, “México Media Pact Marks PR Battle in Drug War,” *In Sight Crime: Organized Crime in the Americas*, March 29, 2011, <http://www.insightcrime.org/news-analysis/México-media-pact-marks-pr-battle-in-drug-war>.

television outlets, further magnifying their coverage.<sup>191</sup> The propaganda justifies narco-activity, strengthens a base of support for cartel operations, and provides for the unprecedented reach of cartel influence.

***b. Material***

Exogenous material support includes illicit production of narcotics, use of foreign real estate for transportation and storage of product, and operational assistance from indigenous personnel. While the majority of marijuana is produced within Mexican and U.S. borders, cartels rely on exogenous provision of other high-demand narcotics. Cocaine and some forms of heroin are purchased at wholesale prices from Colombia and other Central and South American locations.<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, in 2011 cartels relied on 252 tons of chemical imports from China and India to produce methamphetamines.<sup>193</sup>

In addition to production support, Mexican cartels seek control over Central American drug routes that connect bulk distribution in South America. The Sinaloa cartel actively operates in the jungles of Honduras, while *Los Zetas* distribute narcotics and extort local businesses in Guatemala.<sup>194</sup> It even recruits locals to fight against the Guatemalan Army.<sup>195</sup> Exogenous support is a necessary component of México's organized crime that facilitates various mechanisms, including organization of personnel, financing, logistics, intelligence operations, and communications.

**3. Conversion Mechanisms**

***a. Personnel Organization***

As with any large organization, a coherent distribution of personnel is a necessary component of the overall system. A study of Mexican cartels suggests that, similar to Colombian cartels, leadership maintains control of operations down to the lowest level.

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<sup>191</sup> Grayson, *La Familia Drug Cartel*, 42.

<sup>192</sup> Michele Norris, "Mexican Drugs, U.S. Markets," National Public Radio, April 17, 2009, accessed February 7, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=103224933>.

<sup>193</sup> Keefe, "Cocaine Incorporated," 4.

<sup>194</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 257.

<sup>195</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

“La Tuta” Gomez of the Knights Templar cartel extends this control to the mining and export of illegal iron ore, reportedly controlling all aspects of its procurement, transportation, and sale.<sup>196</sup> Similarly, “El Chapo” Guzman is described as “obsessive” and “micromanaging.” Prior to his arrest in February 2014, “El Chapo” reportedly maintained strict oversight of the logistical network that produced and distributed all the cartel’s narcotics.<sup>197</sup>

In the traditional structure, the “godfathers” direct capos in all activities, who then disseminate orders to local turf commanders and their associated cells.<sup>198</sup> Leaders maintain a narrow span of control and authority on significant decisions. At the ground level, there is a standardization of work processes for the operating core to execute.<sup>199</sup> Proficiency in the conduct of illicit activities is important, and so too is a sense of trust and loyalty amongst personnel operating for each cartel.

To mitigate the potential for turncoats, some cartels develop a structure of inter-marriage amongst its members and associates. The familial ties secure a sense of allegiance and trust that is crucial to the operational security of cartel activity.<sup>200</sup> Additionally, cartel activities rely on extensive cooperation with personnel and organizations outside of the cartel. Alliances between cartels constantly evolve, forming when it is to the advantage of those involved. Incorporating these alliances into the personnel structure is quite difficult, as alliances are broken as quickly as they are started. Leaders of the Knights Templar once formed a relationship with *Los Zetas*, which was quickly broken once the two cartels began battling over contested territory.<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Guillermo Galdos, “Finding La Tuta, México’s Knights Templar Drug Lord,” *Channel 4 News (UK)*, February 25, 2014. <http://www.channel4.com/news/México-knights-templar-drug-cartel-la-tuta-servando-gomez>.

<sup>197</sup> Keefe, “Cocaine Incorporated,” 2.

<sup>198</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 211.

<sup>199</sup> Henry Mintzberg, *Structure in Fives* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1993).

<sup>200</sup> Elaine Shannon, *Desperados: Latin Drug Lords, U.S. Lawmen, and the War America Can’t Win* (New York: The Penguin Group, 1989), 64.

<sup>201</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 198.

The danger posed by both law enforcement and rival cartels requires an organizational structure characterized by secrecy and compartmentalization. For example, no good estimate exists to accurately describe the Sinaloa cartel's size, as estimates range from 150 to 150,000.<sup>202</sup> The compartmentalization of each cartels' organization is necessary as law enforcement and rivals pursue sensitive information that is vital to a cartel's existence.

Finally, cartels adopted the paramilitary wing as a component of personnel organization to protect their interests. The once powerful Gulf cartel is largely credited with establishing the first para-military wing, with *Los Zetas*.<sup>203</sup> Other cartels adopted a similar structure in the face of increased violence, preferring a paramilitary force built from the many soldiers who have deserted the Mexican Army.<sup>204</sup> Cartels have developed an intricate web of personnel organization that addresses all their interests and generally maintains the flexibility to adapt in a volatile environment of illicit activity.

#### ***b. Financing***

Modeling legitimate business, criminal organizations establish a mechanism to recycle profit into the system. The macro level of narco-trafficking has a distinct method of self-financing the production and transportation of illegal drugs. A cartel in México can purchase a kilo of cocaine in the Andean regions of Colombia for roughly \$2,000 and sell that same kilo at wholesale prices in the United States for \$30,000. In total, experts estimate that gross revenue from México's drug trafficking into U.S. territory amounts to more than \$6 Billion.<sup>205</sup> Cartels reinvest these revenues into drug operations as well as legitimate business endeavors.<sup>206</sup>

*Los Zetas* expanded its financing mechanisms to include operations and revenue beyond drug trafficking, creating a truly diversified criminal enterprise. Extortion of local

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<sup>202</sup> Keefe, "Cocaine Incorporated," 6.

<sup>203</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 94.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 213.

<sup>205</sup> Keefe, "Cocaine Incorporated," 1.

<sup>206</sup> Anonymous (b), Mexican military officer, May 19, 2014, interview with the author.

businesses and traffic control points along drug trafficking routes add to the illegitimate revenue of the organization.<sup>207</sup> Other illicit activities include kidnapping, prostitution rings, oil and gas syphoning, even a vast distribution of pirated DVDs. Ioan Grillo refers to such a diversified organization as a criminal paramilitary complex.<sup>208</sup>

Similar to *Los Zetas*, The Knights Templar inherited a diversified operation that includes activities outside of drug trafficking. While substantial revenues come from methamphetamines, extortion of Michoacán residents provides another source of significant income.<sup>209</sup> Additionally, the cartel smuggles iron ore to the Far East through Chinese firms.<sup>210</sup> In today's criminal environment, cartels pursue every effort towards financial growth and expansion.

### *c. Logistics*

A third instrument in the distribution of illegal product is a sophisticated logistics network. The mid-1980s crackdown by U.S. authorities on Colombian cocaine shipments through the Caribbean led to the improvement of ground transportation routes through México. Nonetheless, cocaine and other illegal drugs travel via ship, submarine, or light aircraft from Central and South America to México.<sup>211</sup> The drugs are then transported to the United States through a variety of means, including submersible watercraft and intricate tunnel systems that extend underneath the U.S.-México border.<sup>212</sup>

Notwithstanding the need for secrecy in order to avoid the confiscation of illegal products, most cartels tend to mirror legitimate commodity businesses in their logistical organization. For example, many large corporations move their facilities to countries that offer the lowest cost of labor and production. Similarly, the Sinaloa cartel recently began growing marijuana in remote forests of the United States to reduce the cost of

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<sup>207</sup> Logan, "A Profile of Los Zetas: México's Second Most Powerful Drug Cartel," 6.

<sup>208</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 261.

<sup>209</sup> Grayson, "Mayhem in Michoacán."

<sup>210</sup> Walker, "Fear and Respect: On the Trail of a Mexican Drug Lord."

<sup>211</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 138.

<sup>212</sup> Keefe, "Cocaine Incorporated," 4.

transportation and eliminate the challenge of successfully crossing the border.<sup>213</sup> In doing so, cartels face obstacles in the return of cash profits to México. Once money is consolidated and brought across the border, professional money launderers bank a portion of the illicit profits while the rest remains in cash.<sup>214</sup> The cartels' diversification of the massive drug proceeds makes it quite difficult for anti-money laundering operations to achieve a significant impact. In order to sustain such complex personnel, logistics, and financing structures, cartels rely as much, if not more, on accurate information.

*d. Intelligence*

A fourth mechanism, crucial to the sustainment of cartel activity, is a robust intelligence network. Cartels in México understand the importance of an information advantage over security forces to maintain their illicit operations. As a result, they employ countless civilians to report on law enforcement activity. Michael Braun, former DEA agent, explained that in some cities, almost every taxi driver provides information to cartel members on law enforcement activity.<sup>215</sup> As a conversion mechanism, the cartels combine all information provided by locals and corrupt authority to maintain an advantage over their adversaries. Such a robust intelligence network has been critical to the longevity of cartel operations in México.

*e. Communication*

A fifth mechanism involves the ability to communicate through covert and clandestine means. This mechanism directly affects the ability to preserve information regarding the cartel structure, allows coordination of product shipments, and facilitates the execution of small-scale attacks. In the age of technological advances, cartels communicate through secret networks with cell phones and radios that transmit via internal antennas and repeaters. These advanced networks cover hundreds of miles,

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 7.

allowing for communication between operatives with a mitigated risk of compromise.<sup>216</sup> All conversion mechanisms serve as essential elements of cartel operations. They function together and provide the necessary means for violent outputs that threaten security in numerous regions of México.

#### **4. Outputs**

The violent outputs of some Mexican cartels have a striking similarity to that of Colombia's cartels in the 1980s–1990s. Some argue that signs of sabotage, violence against individuals, and small scale attacks parallel, and in some cases, exceed the violence witnessed in Colombia's struggle.

##### ***a. Sabotage***

Fortunately, the drug war has not seen any large scale acts of sabotage aimed at the Mexican government. Instead, a few cartels aim to disrupt the local population, particularly when they are noncompliant with cartel demands. Most notorious in this realm is the Knights Templar, who resorted to various acts of sabotage in efforts to subdue a growing number of vigilante groups in Michoacán. In some instances, the cartel has destroyed vital resources such as electricity and gas stations. In other cases, it has punished noncompliant business owners by torching their businesses to the ground.<sup>217</sup> Other cartels tend to avoid any action that disrupts the livelihood of populations in mass. Most acts of sabotage deliberately target individuals who impede or otherwise adversely affect cartel operations.

##### ***b. Violence Against Individuals***

A large lesson from the Medellín cartel's demise is that high-profile attacks typically draw unwanted attention. Even within México's borders, the 1985 slaying of DEA agent Kiki Camarena triggered unrelenting pressure by U.S. officials for justice.<sup>218</sup>

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<sup>216</sup> Jason Beaubien, "México Busts Drug Cartels' Private Phone Networks," National Public Radio, December 9, 2011, accessed March 26, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2011/12/09/143442365/México-busts-drug-cartels-private-phone-networks>.

<sup>217</sup> Grayson, "Mayhem in Michoacán."

<sup>218</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 67.

Unfortunately, the pursuit of wealth and power sometimes blinds criminals to history's lessons. Such was the case in the 2008 slaying of Edgar Millan, the acting head of the Mexican federal police.<sup>219</sup> Three years later, *Los Zetas* killed a U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agent on a San Luis Potosi highway.<sup>220</sup> Most recently was the July 2013 assassination of Navy Vice-Admiral Carlos Miguel Salazar by the Knights Templar.<sup>221</sup> While these actions likely stiffened the resolve of security forces, they display the powerful capability of numerous cartels to threaten the highest levels of their state opposition.

*c. Small-Scale Attacks*

Each cartel employs its respective para-military force to protect their interests as well as attack rivals and government forces. Over seven years after ex-President Felipe Calderón initiated his 'drug war,' cartel operatives use assault rifles and rocket-propelled grenades to attack police stations in some parts of the country.<sup>222</sup> Ambush-style killings, known as *ejecuciones* (executions), account for the majority of casualties in this tragic wave of violence.<sup>223</sup> In rare instances, cartels even employ car bombs against their adversaries.<sup>224</sup> The recent increase in violence throughout the state of Michoacán has triggered the deployment of thousands of Mexican security forces. In response, the Knights Templar have staged a number of ambush-style attacks along contested highway routes against federal police convoys.<sup>225</sup> The coordination and ferocity of the cartels' kinetic capabilities is alarming. Their actions have a stiff impact on Mexican authority, as well as the concern of the greater international arena.

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 122.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>221</sup> Gustavo Ruiz and Adriana Gomez-Licon, "Carlos Miguel Salazar, México Navy Vice Admiral, Killed in Ambush," *The Huffington Post*, July 28, 2013, accessed February 17, 2014, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/29/carlos-miguel-salazar-killed\\_n\\_3670364.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/07/29/carlos-miguel-salazar-killed_n_3670364.html).

<sup>222</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 11.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 217-218.

<sup>225</sup> Ruiz and Gomez-Licon, "Carlos Miguel Salazar, México Navy Vice Admiral, Killed in Ambush."



## **5. Effects on Authority**

The security problem posed by cartels has had a profound impact at all levels of the Mexican government and law enforcement. First, corruption frustrates attempts to effectively target cartel operations. Furthermore, the audacity of cartel actions against security forces has provoked instances of overreaction by the military or police, which adds to support for the cartels. Understandably frustrated by repeated attacks on security forces, aggressive responses sometimes result in the death of innocent civilians.<sup>226</sup> Last, the cartels' grip on the population traps state authorities in an information disadvantage. Similar to the problem faced by Colombian law enforcement against the powerful cartels of Cali and Medellín, these challenges pose a tall order for Mexican security forces. The state's current kingpin strategy, while effective at its goal of eliminating high level leaders, has not had an enduring impact on cartel activity nor the overall violence plaguing the country. México must develop a responsive model that minimizes the influence of cartels operating within the country, and reduces violence to manageable levels.

## **6. Effects on Endogenous Inputs**

Mexican cartels have developed a system far more diversified than their Colombian predecessors. Since Calderón's drug war began in 2006, a number of cartels have risen, fallen, and fragmented to create new organizations. In spite of any government successes, the cartels have shown a resiliency to fill any power vacancies quickly and efficiently. Seven years later, the war rages on with no immediate end in sight. One might argue that future contributions, particularly through diversification, will help the cartels endure any further government efforts against their operations. If government attacks on drug operations yield any success, the cartels might shift their efforts towards various other illicit operations. On the other hand, aggressive activities such as kidnapping and extortion have the potential to exceed the threshold of violence that locals are willing to accept. A potential result might resemble the growing vigilante movement in Michoacán against the Knights Templar. While this movement is regionally

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<sup>226</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 129.

restricted, its potential success might invigorate other communities to take similar action and stand up against the cartels. Albeit different from the Colombian cartel problem in the 1980s and 1990s, Mexican security forces must understand the changing dynamics of the system and environment in which the cartels operate to truly achieve tangible effects and restore security and stability within all regions of their country.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

There are numerous cartels currently operating within Mexican borders. Despite their differences in style and execution, all pursue similar goals through a system of coercive violence, persuasive propaganda, diversified operations, and complex logistics, creating a number of challenges for Mexican law enforcement organizations.

A law enforcement model does not need to be built from scratch. While the Colombian model has several distinct differences, there are numerous lessons to be learned and applied from Colombia's law enforcement strategy against the cartels of Medellín and Cali in the 1980s and 1990s. The next chapter highlights the differences and similarities between Colombia and México, and recommends a hybrid version, distinct in its own right, but with numerous attributes of the Colombian law enforcement model. The ultimate goal is a law enforcement approach that regains lost territory from the cartels and reduces violence to a manageable level through the use of legitimate, competent, and respected security forces.

## **V. COMPARING LAW ENFORCEMENT STRATEGIES TOWARDS SECURITY AND STABILITY OPERATIONS IN COLOMBIA AND MÉXICO**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

The Mexican government has entered its eighth year of regional violence and instability in the fight against criminal organizations. Estimates suggest as many as 80,000 casualties since the government's offensive began in December 2006.<sup>227</sup> The first six years of the drug war, under the direction of ex-President Felipe Calderón, represented a militarization of security forces to defeat cartel operations. The strategy included more than 90,000 combat troops, deployed to confront cartels and target their leadership through a kingpin strategy.<sup>228</sup> Police units maintained a supporting role in the offensive, mainly due to corruption and incompetence at municipal, state, and federal levels. Although military units were relatively successful in targeting cartel leadership, the kingpin strategy unintentionally contributed to violence through the resultant power vacuums, fragmentation, and territorial disputes.

In 2012, PRI candidate Enrique Peña Nieto vowed to reform the militarized strategy of his predecessor. Roughly 15 months after he assumed the presidency, the military (in particular, the Navy's Special Forces) still leads operations against organized crime as the violence continues in numerous regions of México.<sup>229</sup> Although the murder rate has dropped by roughly 10 percent, kidnappings have increased by almost 20

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<sup>227</sup> Janet Davison and Kazi Stastna, "México's Cartels: Behind the Drug War," *CBC News*, February 26, 2014, accessed March 29, 2014, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/México-s-cartels-behind-the-drug-war-1.2549149>.

<sup>228</sup> Peter Chalk, "México's New Strategy to Combat Drug Cartels: Evaluating the National Gendarmería," *CTC Sentinel* 6, no. 5 (May 2013): 16.

<sup>229</sup> Clay Boggs, "One Year after Enrique Peña Nieto's Election" (*Washington Office on Latin America*, July 2, 2013) accessed March 29, 2014, [http://www.wola.org/commentary/one\\_year\\_after\\_enrique\\_pena\\_nieto\\_s\\_election](http://www.wola.org/commentary/one_year_after_enrique_pena_nieto_s_election).

percent.<sup>230</sup> Ioan Grillo suggests that these statistics reflect the diversification of organized crime. He also asserts that as the kingpin strategy removes cartel leaders, lower level cartel members turn to kidnapping as a source of income.<sup>231</sup> As the violence continues, so too does the requirement for a law enforcement strategy to regain the confidence of the population, reduce the country's violence, and reclaim control of contested territory within México's borders.

A successful campaign against organized crime involves various strategies to affect the cartel's ability to produce outputs in the form of violence, influence, and illicit production. The Colombian law enforcement model of the late twentieth century defeated two powerful drug cartels in the cities of Medellín and Cali by reducing their violent capability and influential reach. This resulted in much smaller drug trafficking organizations, which were much reduced in violent capability, and substantially abridged in coercive capacity.<sup>232</sup> There was little to no change in the production and transportation of illicit narcotics.

Although the problems faced in contemporary México are distinct, there are a number of similarities to the twentieth century cartels in Medellín and Cali. A hybrid version of Colombia's law enforcement model of the 1990s can assist México in developing a strategy to achieve similar effects and reduce cartels to manageable criminal organizations. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the differences between Colombia and México, acknowledge the similarities, and map out a hybrid law enforcement approach that assists Mexican security forces in the ultimate removal of large criminal organizations.

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<sup>230</sup> Secretaría de Gobernación [Secretary of governance], *Incidencia Delictiva Nacional, Fuero Común* [National Criminal Incidence, Common Law] 1997-2014, March 19, 2014, accessed April 11, 2014, [http://www.secretariadoejecutivosnp.gob.mx/es/SecretariadoEjecutivo/Incidencia\\_Delictiva\\_Nacional\\_fuero\\_comun](http://www.secretariadoejecutivosnp.gob.mx/es/SecretariadoEjecutivo/Incidencia_Delictiva_Nacional_fuero_comun).

<sup>231</sup> Ioan Grillo, "Mexico's Drug War Leads to Kidnappings, Vigilante Violence," *Time Magazine*, January 17, 2014.

<sup>232</sup> Vanda Felbab-Brown, "Lessons from Colombia for México? Caveat Emptor," *ReVista Magazine*, February 24, 2012, accessed March 29, 2014, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/articles/2012/02/24-colombia-Mexico-felbabbrown>.

## **B. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN COLOMBIAN CARTELS OF THE 1980S AND 1990S AND CONTEMPORARY MEXICAN CARTELS**

The law enforcement model applied by the CNP was largely effective at reducing the violence and influence of the Medellín and Cali cartels. Nevertheless, this strategy should not be viewed as an approach that can be standardized to combat all criminal organizations. The Mexican problem embodies several distinct differences from the challenges faced by Colombian security forces. Ignoring the differences between the two struggles creates the risk of an ineffective approach that limits any form of tangible success.

The most apparent difference between the two countries simply involves the number of cartels implicated in illicit activity. The Colombian model targeted two major cartel organizations in successive fashion, while the Mexican government simultaneously battles numerous cartels within the nation's borders.<sup>233</sup> A successive strategy to defeat the cartels one by one would exceed any acceptable timeframe, and likely run the risk that one or more cartels grow to unprecedented size and strength.

Second, Mexican cartels have expanded the spectrum of inputs that contribute to the contemporary cartel system. The Medellín and Cali cartels largely avoided extreme measures of extortion or violence directly targeting the local populace. Although kidnappings and murders were a staple of the Colombian cartels, the majority of these operations maintained some relation to the drug trade. In México, numerous cartels sustain their wealth and influence through coercive extortion measures aimed at the local population.<sup>234</sup> When extortion fails, cartels resort to violence to punish the local populace.<sup>235</sup> This is a stark contrast to Colombian activities that largely focused all efforts on maximizing profit through drug trafficking operations.

Third, the financing mechanisms of México's cartels have expanded 'business' operations into a diversified field of illicit activity. The Colombian cartels relied on drug

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<sup>233</sup> Marinas de las Fuerzas Especiales de México, "The Mexican Cartels."

<sup>234</sup> Keefe, "Cocaine Incorporated," 7.

<sup>235</sup> Grillo, "Mexican Vigilantes Beat Back Ruthless Knights Templar Cartel."

profits and money laundering to finance their respective systems.<sup>236</sup> Mexican cartels such as *Los Zetas* or the Knights Templar finance through extortion, prostitution, oil and gas syphoning, illegal mining of precious metals,<sup>237</sup> and pirated DVDs.<sup>238</sup> This diversity affords cartels the potential ability to contain any successful law enforcement efforts aimed at drug activities. Furthermore, it creates a more complex environment than what was faced by Colombian police forces. Such differences suggest that replicating the Colombian law enforcement model would not effectively address the security situation faced by Mexican forces. Despite these differences, there are a number of parallels to the Colombian study. Accordingly, Colombia's model provides valuable lessons learned that are essential to the development of a sound Mexican law enforcement strategy.

### **C. SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE EARLIER COLOMBIAN CARTEL SYSTEM AND MÉXICO'S MODERN-DAY CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS**

History's lessons, particularly in Colombia's targeting of "system components" similar to those of Mexican cartels, allow Mexican law enforcement to develop an informed strategy to engage its country's various criminal organizations. An analysis of the cartels in both environments suggests similar contributions through coercive violence, the discrediting of authority, and aggressive bribery efforts. Furthermore, various inputs, conversion mechanisms, and violent effects on authority give the impression that the Mexican cartel system is in many ways a rough reflection of its Colombian predecessors.

The majority of coercive and persuasive tactics used by Mexican cartels tend to reflect the efforts of Colombian godfathers throughout the 1980s and early 1990s. Kidnappings, torture, and murder affect regions of México just as they did in Colombia. One might argue that countless decapitations, even the dissolving of corpses in acid, suggest that México's coercive tactics have exceeded the efforts of Medellín and Cali. Additionally, both case studies cite widespread attempts to discredit authority through any available platform. Parallel to these slanderous activities is a dedicated pursuit to buy

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<sup>236</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 93.

<sup>237</sup> Grayson, "Mayhem in Michoacán."

<sup>238</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 261.

complicity. Colombian cartels bribed security forces at all levels, from low-level patrolmen to generals.<sup>239</sup> Similarly, Mexican cartels annually spend over one billion dollars in bribes of law enforcement and politicians.<sup>240</sup> Not surprisingly, these similarities continue into the majority of inputs and conversion mechanisms at the core of cartel systems in both countries.

The Mexican cartel system operates through the next generation of inputs and conversion mechanisms when compared to its Colombian predecessors. While subtle differences distinguish current cartels from Medellín and Cali, the core elements are quite similar. Cali godfathers secured vital information from local citizens by contributing to the local economy.<sup>241</sup> Twenty five years later, Mexican cartels employ local spy networks to secure vital information.<sup>242</sup> An association of legitimate radio stations was funded by Cali in order to ensure positive press on the cartel's activities.<sup>243</sup> Mexican cartels use news, internet, and even musical ballads to promote their agendas in a respectable light.<sup>244</sup>

In addition to cartel inputs and activities, there are similarities in the general structure of their respective organizations. Criminal organizations in both studies operate in a centralized structure. In the same way Pablo Escobar controlled every aspect of his cartel's cocaine trade, "El Chapo" Guzman obsessively maintained strict oversight of the Sinaloa cartel's narcotics distribution. With compartmented logistical networks, focus on intelligence, and evolving communications methods, Mexican cartels appear to be an extension of what the Colombian framework might look like if the organizations from Medellín and Cali survived into the twenty-first century. Understanding the similarities and differences between the two studies can assist in determining which aspects of

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<sup>239</sup> Salcedo, "What I Saw Inside the Cali Drug Cartel."

<sup>240</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 11.

<sup>241</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 68.

<sup>242</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 144.

<sup>243</sup> Fabio Castillo, *The Riders of Cocaine*.

<sup>244</sup> Grillo, *El Narco*, 179–180.

Colombian law enforcement strategy might appropriately address the Mexican problem, while eliminating efforts that are either unique to Colombia or simply do not apply to México's security strategy.

**D. A MEXICAN LAW ENFORCEMENT MODEL: HOW TO APPLY ELEMENTS OF COLOMBIA'S MODEL TO CREATE A UNIQUE AND EFFECTIVE MEXICAN STRATEGY**

The law enforcement model used by the CNP against the Medellín and Cali cartels contains several features that appropriately address challenges against the various criminal organizations in México. First, a strategy must nest with a committed national policy to reduce the cartels' reach and regain control over contested regions of the country. Law enforcement must have the ability to leverage national policy to reduce criminal organizations. Second, a dedicated Mexican law enforcement entity, unified in command, must focus on the defeat of organized crime. Cooperation amongst all participating security forces is paramount to the success of such a strategy. Third, the growth of enduring international partnerships that bring unique capabilities and experience to Mexican security forces is essential. Most sensitive to this pillar is the development of partnerships that fit within the guidelines of the Mexican constitution. Fourth, an enduring integration with the local populace, particularly with respect to the country's growing vigilante movement, to establish an information advantage against criminal organizations that facilitates effective targeting against the cartel system. Such a strategy integrates all available resources in a concerted effort to defeat México's cartel system through support from the local populace, and permits enduring stability in México's most volatile regions.

**1. Government Policy: Extradition**

Any law enforcement strategy must nest within the support of a sound national policy against the cartels. In Colombia, one of the most significant points of leverage involved the policy of extradition to the United States. The Colombian government repeatedly issued decrees to amend extradition policy and persuade cartel leaders to



surrender to authorities.<sup>245</sup> Flexibility in extradition policy provided the necessary leverage to negotiate the surrender of mid to high level cartel leadership.

Similar to Colombia, Mexican cartel leaders strongly oppose extradition to the United States, as witnessed by lawyers' petition to block extradition of "El Chapo" Guzman after his arrest in February 2014.<sup>246</sup> Although extradition can provide a valuable bargaining chip, an important caveat is that México must not completely dismiss extradition to the United States, as certain individuals are better confined in US prisons. Nonetheless, a flexible extradition policy allows law enforcement the ability to negotiate surrender of cartel leadership, which provides a secondary benefit of crucial information to deplete the cartels' personnel structure.

## **2. Law Enforcement Reform**

Colombia's main effort against the drug cartels was appropriately assigned to the nation's federal police force. In México, widespread corruption and lack of confidence in police forces required the military to take the lead in operations against the cartels. While specialized military units, particularly the *Fuerzas Especiales de la Fuerza de Infantería de Marina* (Mexican Navy's elite Marine Special Forces), have proved effective at targeting cartel leadership, they are limited in their abilities to conduct sustained law enforcement activities. Units typically deploy for no longer than 90 days, which limits the units' ability to build relationships and gather information.<sup>247</sup> A dedicated police force, free of corruption and human rights abuses and competent in enduring law enforcement operations, is most appropriate to achieve lasting success against the cartels.

Efforts have already begun in México through the development of a *Gendarmería Nacional* (National Gendarmerie), a paramilitary federal police division dedicated to the

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<sup>245</sup> Stan Yarbro, "Colombia Drug Cartel Leader Surrenders: Cocaine: Fabio Ochoa Cites a Government Promise of No Extradition," *Los Angeles Times*, December 19, 1990.

<sup>246</sup> Dolia Estevez, "Should Mexican Drug Lord Joaquin 'El Chapo' Guzman be Extradited to the U.S.?" *Forbes*, February 22, 2014, accessed April 2, 2014, <http://www.forbes.com/sites/doliaestevez/2014/02/25/should-mexican-drug-lord-joaquin-el-chapo-guzman-be-extradited-to-the-u-s/>.

<sup>247</sup> Anonymous (a), Mexican military officer, interview with the author, January 29, 2014.

provision of security in rural and marginalized areas.<sup>248</sup> Similar to Colombia's Search Bloc, unit members will be vetted, trained, and armed to restore order in areas of instability.<sup>249</sup> Although the Search Bloc provided a direct action capability, México's *Gendarmería* must be trained for an enduring presence in its respective areas of responsibility. Once security is established, the force should transition to enduring law enforcement activity.<sup>250</sup> It is also recommended that it maintain authority to collect information in its respective areas of operation.<sup>251</sup>

To maximize effectiveness, Mexican authorities must establish a clear line of coordination and unified command amongst the *Gendarmería* and participating forces. The need for military raids will likely persist, particularly against cartel leadership. Information must be shared and operations coordinated with the *Gendarmería*. Furthermore, it must be trained in population-focused, internal defense operations, similar in structure to village stability operations (VSO) practiced by United States Army Special Forces in Afghanistan. The *Gendarmería* faces a number of challenges in its development, employment, and sustainment. With a unified command, proper coordination, enduring presence, and appropriate training, this new federal police force brings a sense of optimism in the struggle to defeat México's cartels.

### **3. International Partnerships**

Paramount to Colombia's accomplishments against the Medellín and Cali cartels was an intimate partnership with the United States, particularly with units from the military's SOCOM and the DEA. The combination of technical surveillance assets, training capabilities, and human intelligence support enhanced CNP proficiencies in gathering reliable intelligence against the cartels.

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<sup>248</sup> "Commanders of México's New Police Force being Trained in France and Colombia," *Fox News Latino*, March 4, 2014, accessed April 2, 2014, <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/news/2014/03/04/commanders-México-new-police-force-being-trained-in-france-and-colombia/>.

<sup>249</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 66–67.

<sup>250</sup> "Commanders of México's New Police" *Fox News Latino*.

<sup>251</sup> Chalk, "México's New Strategy to Combat Drug Cartels," 17.

International support to Mexican security forces is limited by constitutional constraints. Although the United States has vested interest in the defeat of Mexican cartels, anything involving U.S. combat troops is almost impossible. The Mexican Constitution clearly explains that national politics of self-determination do not permit any intervention by foreign forces.<sup>252</sup> Nonetheless, Mexican forces participate in training programs hosted by several international partners, including the United States, France, and Colombia.<sup>253</sup> Furthermore, the United States currently provides equipment support, including Blackhawk helicopters and surveillance drones.<sup>254</sup> Continued support is necessary to the success of Mexican forces, particularly the newly created *Gendarmería*. With close geographical proximity, Mexican law enforcement assigned to target the cartels might benefit from a lasting relationship with U.S. Special Forces, who specialize in the internal defense operations that specifically apply to cartel activity. Just as important as the defeat of the cartels is an ability to work with and through the local populace. Such skills are a necessary tool in México's current environment, particularly with the country's growing vigilante movement.

#### **4. Integration at the Local Level**

A close relationship and support of the local populace is arguably the most important element of a successful model against organized crime. Similar to the CNP, Mexican security forces have yet to succeed in gaining any ground in the battle for information at the local level. Cartel presence and intimidation contributes to its advantage in information against government forces.

In Colombia, two dynamics allowed the CNP to gain popular support and pursue a strategy that integrated the procurement of valuable information. First, a series of spectacular attacks by Pablo Escobar and the Medellín cartel resulted in a significant shift in popular opinion against the cartel. Colombians no longer saw the cartel as a harmless

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<sup>252</sup> Anonymous (b), Mexican military officer, interview with the author, January 29, 2014.

<sup>253</sup> "Commanders of México's New Police Force being Trained in France and Colombia."

<sup>254</sup> Ioan Grillo, "U.S. Troops Increase Aid to México in Drug War," National Public Radio, October 6, 2011, accessed April 3, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2011/10/06/141128178/u-s-troops-increase-aid-to-mexico-in-drug-war>.

evil, and preferred that Colombian authorities pursue an aggressive strategy to rid the country of such a violent organization.<sup>255</sup> Second was the formation of *Los Pepes*, a covert organization composed of locals and rival Cali cartel members. Although illegal, this group added the element of a quasi-vigilante force that could infiltrate the cartel system's information inputs. Due to the sensitivity of working with an illegal group, the CNP maintained clandestine collaboration with *Los Pepes*, but immensely benefited from their working relationship.<sup>256</sup>

Mexican law enforcement currently find themselves in a similar situation. Citizens have grown tired of intimidation and extortion of local families and businesses. In many instances, cartels like *Los Zetas* and the Knights Templar have exceeded the threshold of acceptable violence. The state of Michoacán provides an appropriate example, where despondent locals developed a series of robust vigilante groups to regain territory from the Knights Templar. Initially, the Mexican government opposed these vigilante groups and sought to disband them. In January 2014, the government reversed its position and welcomed the vigilante groups under the constitutionally established *Cuerpos de Fuerzas Rurales* (Rural Defense Corps), or simply called *Rurales*.<sup>257</sup> According to regulations, these forces fall under the Ministry of National Defense and cooperate with the Mexican Army's chain of command, but ultimately answer to their respective state governments.<sup>258</sup> As the *Gendarmería* fall under the federal police, a constitutionally acceptable command structure must ensure the Rural Defense Corps operates under legal jurisdiction.

Pairing rural defense groups with professionally trained personnel has the potential to devastate the cartels. Unlike *Los Pepes*, the *Rurales* is a legitimized security

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<sup>255</sup> Bowden, *Killing Pablo*, 59.

<sup>256</sup> Chepesiuk, *The Bullet or the Bribe*, 146–147.

<sup>257</sup> Associated Press, “México Legalizes Vigilante Groups in Michoacán, Welcomes Them in Fight against Drug Cartels,” *CBS News*, January 28, 2014, accessed on April 3, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/México-vigilantes-legalized-and-put-under-military-umbrella/>.

<sup>258</sup> Agustín Olachea Aviles, “Instructivo para la Organización, Funcionamiento y Empleo de los Cuerpos de Defensa Rurales” [Instruction for the Organization, Operation and Use of the Rural Defense Corps], *General de División Secretario*, México D.F., México, March 21, 1964.

force. With an appropriate vetting process and training in both tactics and human rights, Mexican authorities can fully employ the *Rurales* to attack the cartel system, gain an information advantage, and defeat cartels.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

The Mexican problem is not the same as Colombia's, and a cookie-cutter approach using Colombia's law enforcement model is not the solution. Colombia battled with two drug trafficking organizations; México faces more than 10 powerful criminal organizations with a diversified criminal structure and rampant extortion with a focus on any form of profitable activity. Nevertheless, various operations that made up the Colombian cartel system are applicable to México's current criminal organizations. An effective law enforcement strategy resembles a hybrid version of the Colombian model. First, nesting the strategy with national policy, particularly in extradition, allows law enforcement to leverage such policy against the cartels. Second, robust reform combined with a distinct and unified command permits the creation and employment of a reputable federal police force, supported by military action when required. Third, international partnerships and collaboration continue to expand within constitutional limitations, allowing for maximum benefit of available resources. Finally, a calculated approach to partnership with armed citizen groups provides an irreplaceable tool in infiltrating the cartels' information flow. The combination of elements provides an enduring framework to reduce violence to acceptable levels and regain security in all regions, restoring México's reputation as a growing and stable environment.

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## **VI. A HYBRID APPROACH: MODIFYING COLOMBIA'S LAW ENFORCEMENT MODEL TO FIT CONTEMPORARY MÉXICO**

The general structure of México's cartels is superficially similar to its Colombian predecessors, but there are numerous inputs and conversion mechanisms within the Mexican cartel system that suggest a unique problem and require a specific law enforcement response. Correspondingly, a hybrid version of Colombia's law enforcement model is necessary to succeed in reducing the power and influence of organized crime and restoring stability in affected regions of México.

The Colombian cartels of the late twentieth century centered their illicit activities on the production, transportation, and distribution of illegal narcotics. Any associated activities within the system were to complement and support drug trafficking operations. In México, organized crime has expanded its size and depth to include numerous activities outside of drug trafficking operations. Drug interdiction efforts that emulate the Colombian law enforcement model will likely have a marginal impact on such a diversified system of financing mechanisms.

Nonetheless, the Mexican cartel system retains a number of attributes that were essential to Colombian organized crime. Centralized control, the use of violence, intimidation, and bribery, and the pursuit of information remain constant in contemporary organized crime. These attributes are important in understanding the applicability of Colombia's law enforcement model to México's current problem.

The Colombian law enforcement model targeted virtually all conversion mechanisms of the cartel system, including the personnel structure (kingpin strategy), financing, logistics, intelligence, and communication. It developed a specialized federal police unit, relatively absent of corruption, and dedicated to the defeat of the Medellín and Cali cartels. The Colombian government maintained a flexible extradition policy that allowed law enforcement leadership to leverage such policy in negotiations with numerous cartel leaders. Additionally, it incorporated unique capabilities from SOCOM and the DEA to professionalize the force and gather information regarding cartel

structure and operations. Finally, Colombian law enforcement covertly cooperated with an illegal vigilante force (*Los Pepes*) to reduce the cartels' information advantage.

Colombia's federal police defeated the cartels' ability to exist as large and overt organizations, influence authority at the highest levels, and conduct acts of mass violence with impunity. Law enforcement efforts did very little to defeat drug production, trafficking, and distribution. The result was the creation of numerous *cartelitos*, or small cartels, covert in their drug trafficking operations and limited in capacity for large-scale violence.

Can the Colombian law enforcement model apply to the existing struggle against powerful organized crime in México? Currently, the majority of Mexican citizens prefer that law enforcement target the cartels' ability to intimidate and extort the local populace over efforts to disrupt illicit narcotics operations.<sup>259</sup> If the goal is the elimination of drug trafficking operations, Colombia's model has little application. If the Mexican government seeks to reduce the power, influence, and violence of organized crime, a modified version of the Colombian law enforcement model provides a relevant framework. The creation of a *Gendarmería* is similar to Colombia's Search Bloc in that it represents a reorganization of the federal police to address organized crime, however it should differ in its core mission to combat the cartels. While the Search Bloc focused on raids and other kinetic strikes to target cartel leadership, the *Gendarmería* should focus on a long term reinvention of the federal police and enduring strategy to establish a strong relationship

with the local populace. As Colombia permitted direct support from U.S. Special Operations, México should consider developing a similar approach that still ensures compliance with constitutionally mandated non-intervention policies. Finally, where Colombia benefited from cooperation with an illegal vigilante force, Mexican forces can develop a legitimate relationship with rural defenses who may have access to invaluable information on cartel structure and activities. A strategy that nests in national policy,

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<sup>259</sup> Associated Press, "Vigilante Groups Spring up in México in Fight against Cartels," *Fox News*, January 21, 2013, accessed April 8, 2014, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2013/01/21/vigilante-squads-spring-up-in-México-in-fight-against-cartels/>.



focuses on reform, and targets information contributions of the cartel system can set the conditions to effectively reduce cartel size, power, and influence, restore security in all regions, and allow for the pursuit of growth and prosperity in a stable Mexican environment.

At the same time, I identify several issues associated with México's problems, but which lie beyond the scope of this thesis. First, deeper problems related to social inequality and rural and urban poverty should be addressed to further weaken organized crime. Second, the proposed model is meant to reduce the existence of large and influential cartels, decrease violence to manageable levels, and bring enduring security to all regions of México. Similar to Colombia, an enduring network of smaller *cartelitos* is likely to assume drug production and trafficking after a successful defeat of the large cartels. Complementary research is still necessary to deal with the trafficking and consumption of illegal drugs. Lastly, international support is paramount to the success of Mexican security forces. A study should consider the most efficient coordination measures to pursue amongst international partners as well as U.S. inter-agency participation. While the model being proposed here represents an important start, there is a need for more research on the depth and breadth of organized crime in México as part of any effort to improve law enforcement south of the border.

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